The Making of the Christmas Day Bomber

By Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Jacob Amis

Like many of his predecessors, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the “Christmas Day Bomber,” left behind a personal testimony. His was not a scripted “martyrdom video,” but a series of online postings written over the course of two years. They relate a dramatic journey, born of a web of influences. Within a few months of his first Internet writings, Abdulmutallab, already flushed with Salafist religiosity, encountered the highly politicized Islam that is prevalent on the British university campus. The organizations and institutions with which he interacted, as a member and then president of the UCL Islamic Society, openly promulgated a radical worldview: the “War on Terror” is in fact a “War on Islam,” resisted by the freedom fighters of Hamas, Hezbollah and the Taliban, in a valiant defensive jihad. For some, this heroic mantle could extend, with only subtle qualification, to the offensive jihad of al-Qaeda.

One actor on this stage was Shaykh Anwar al-Awlaki. In 2002, dogged by allegations that he mentored two of the September 11 hijackers, Awlaki arrived on the British Islamist scene to a hero’s welcome. It was a hinge moment in an ideological progression originating with the Muslim Brotherhood and later landing him in Yemen at the sharp end of the jihad of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). In 2009, Abdulmutallab joined Awlaki in Yemen. In the intervening years, despite the increasingly violent content of his preaching, Awlaki continued to receive the sponsorship of prominent British Islamic organizations—even when restrictions on his movements limited him to video-link speeches.
The careers of Awlaki and Abdulmutallab powerfully suggest the fluidity of Islamist thought. In particular, they illustrate the confluence between what might be broadly termed “hard” and “soft” Islamism. The latter is based on long-term and largely non-violent social and political activism, while the former looks to immediate violence to further its goals.1 Awlaki and Abdulmutallab, however, moved rapidly and seamlessly within and between these different modes of Islamism, and it would seem that extreme beliefs common to both provided a launching pad for increasingly extreme actions. It is argued here that an intensely literalist yet politically impassive Salafism made Abdulmutallab nevertheless receptive to the activist Islamism of the UCL Islamic Society. Later, he made a further jump to jihadism. It remains to analyze the milieu that framed this change, and the parallel ideological trajectory of Awlaki. This, more than any other element, shaped the violent synergy of theory and practice that was reaped on Christmas Day 2009.

The Internet Writings of Abdulmutallab

Between January 2005 and September 2007, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab regularly contributed to an online Islamic forum, www.gawaher.com, under the pseudonym “Farouk1986.”2 This was the period of his formative journey from the British School of Lomé, Togo, to Arabic studies in Sanaa, Yemen, to his presidency of the Islamic Society of University College, London. His postings to the online forum, which usually offered advice on questions posed by other forum members but occasionally aired his own personal dilemmas directly, ranged from theology to sex and from politics to football. His 310 postings are among the most illuminating primary source material emanating from the convulsions of the War on Terror in recent years. A careful and collective reading of this remarkable stream of consciousness takes us inside the mind of a young man on the path to ever-greater extremism and violence.

The problems of interpretation are manifold. They will be familiar on some level to any routine user of modern communications technology. How do we make sense of the deadpan of raw electronic text? How do we distinguish firm conviction from experimental half-thoughts, the earnest entreaty from the throwaway remark? Where do we find the line between humor, sarcasm and insult in the patois of this particular ethereal micro-community? Such difficulties can derail a dialogue between friends and acquaintances, but the reader does not know Abdulmutallab and never will. Added to this imperfect picture is a fact of immense significance: a little
over two years after his final online post, the 23-year-old was only narrowly prevented from committing suicide and mass murder on Northwest Airlines Flight 253.³

Little wonder, then, that media interest in Abdulmutallab’s online corpus essentially focused on a handful of references to jihad. The most cited passage is indeed eye-catching. On February 20, 2005, an 18-year-old Abdulmutallab responds to a topic on “fantasies” as follows:

Alright, I won’t go into too much detail about my fantasy, but basically they are jihad fantasies. I imagine how the great jihad will take place, how the Muslims will win insha’Allah [God willing] and rule the whole world, and establish the greatest empire once again!!!⁴

Another topic sees Abdulmutallab posting information about his native Nigeria: “So here it is Nigeria. The Muslim Nation. It seems to me that Islam’s rise back to power will come from the roots of Nigeria.”⁵ Elsewhere he opines that “killing is only permitted in jihad, retaliation by sharia for murder, etc.,”⁶ and calls on Allah to “unite us all Muslims and give us victory over those who do not believe.”⁷

Then there are allusions to what might be termed “foreign policy.” In 2005, Abdulmutallab writes, for example, of the divine torment that awaits “Bush” and “all the people who oppress the Muslims” for “invading Muslim lands and killing my Muslim brothers and sisters.”⁸ A disgruntled excursus on the House of Saud harks back further to the first Gulf Crisis and Operation Desert Shield.⁹

Yet one of the most striking aspects of Abdulmutallab’s writings is how little such themes feature, at least initially. Rather, Abdulmutallab’s discourse is dominated by a social, even civilizational, discontent of an exaggeratedly apolitical kind. One of his earliest postings is a revealing soliloquy in which he appeals to “Muslim brothers and sisters” for advice on “several dilemmas I want to get out of and [have] made me lonely.” The lament, which dates from his days at the British School of Lomé (where his piety had already earned him the nickname “The Pope”)¹⁰ is worth reproducing in some length:

First of all, I have no friend. Not because I do not socialise, etc. but because either people do not want to get too close to me as they go partying and stuff while I don’t, or they are bad people who befriend me and influence me to do bad things. Hence I am in a situation where I do not have a friend, I have no one to speak to, no one to consult, no one to support me and I feel depressed and lonely. I do not know what to do.
And then I think this loneliness leads me to other problems. As I get lonely, the natural sexual drive awakens and I struggle to control it, sometimes leading to minor sinful activities like not lowering the gaze...

The last thing I want to talk about is my dilemma between liberalism and extremism. The Prophet said religion is easy and anyone who tries to overburden themselves will find it hard and will not be able to continue. So anytime I relax, I deviate sometimes and then when I strive hard, I get tired of what I am doing i.e. [sic] memorising the Quran, etc. How should one put the balance right?11

Loneliness and sexual frustration form a special refrain in Abdulmutallab’s writings, with both invariably ascribed to the paucity of “good Muslims”—even in Muslim-majority countries.12 In May 2005, he debates whether to attend his school prom, only to conclude: “I think it’s haram [forbidden]. Allah says ‘Do not come near zinah [temptation]’... there’s also the extravagance in spending for the prom, drinking usually takes place, music that excites evil desires.”13 He is dismissive of Western culture, which he sees as centered on “winning girlfriends.”14 For Abdulmutallab, “the biggest obstacle... is the kafir-imposed school system. These guys are just controlling us around anyhow. We ought to have our own systems that will make our ummah do things according to Quran and Sunnah.”15 He urges his fellow forum users to restrict their activities to the “Islamically good,” and also to “hang around with good Muslims, and students who enjoy studying.”16

All this is set against a strong fixation with the minutiae of religious ritual. In language peppered with Arabic terms, Abdulmutallab advises a strict, perfectionist approach to prayer.17 In several places he speaks with apparent earnestness of the existence of Shaytun (Satan) as well as Jinn (spirits).18 From January 2005 he claims to be in the process of memorizing the Quran.19

In the main, Abdulmutallab’s early writings convey a religious and social outlook strongly analogous to more recent forms of apolitical Salafism, or what Olivier Roy has termed “neofundamentalism.” As distinct from political Islamism, one can detect no specific activist or militant zeal for the creation of an Islamic State. Rather, the emphasis is on a narrow and conservative view of Islam, centered on the Quran and the Sunna as practiced by the earliest generations of Muslims, with more interest in umma consciousness and the implementation of sharia than the statist political program of classic Islamist ideology. Above all, it is concerned with the self—religiosity rather than religion—and hence the fixation on personal faith (iman), dress, speech and ritual.20
The religious scholars and institutions that Abdulmutallab mentions reinforce this interpretation. Whatever his thoughts on the Saudi royal family, he is much taken by the Wahhabi imams of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Special praise is reserved for Shaykh Saud al-Shuraim and Abdul Rahman al-Sudais. Significantly, it is their Quranic recitation that enthusiases Abdulmutallab, not their views on Palestine or Iraq. In London, his favorite place of worship is the Regent’s Park Mosque, which is closely linked to and partly funded by the House of Saud. Abdulmutallab also frequently refers forum members to Islam Online, a website that has historically taken its ideological lead from Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, for “professional Islamic counseling”—as opposed to political analysis. He professes to enjoy the sermons of Amr Khaled, the popular Egyptian “televangelist,” but notes that “some people criticize him for not following the Sunna ways, but kafir ways like his dressing in [a] suit and shaving.”

Though this religious austerity characterizes much of his writing from the outset, a progressive literalism is clearly in evidence across his digital footprint. For instance, in his earliest postings, Abdulmutallab discusses soccer with great interest. Yet already by February 2005 he begins to voice doubts: “To be honest football and Islam... they don’t blend very well. It’s a pity.” In the same month he relates that he has stopped wearing clothes by French Connection UK, because the logo alludes to a “foul word.” By November 15, Abdulmutallab, now ensconced at University College London, has definitively turned against football: “Let’s save our honor and religion and try to stay away from football and do sporting activities that are more Islamically beneficial... running, paintball, archery (or any other sport of the like that teaches [how to] target and aim).” Interestingly, musical instruments are jettisoned from the realm of the permissible on the same day.

In December 2005, Abdulmutallab describes a sudden crisis over the consumption of non-halal meat, precipitated by a parental visit. Appealing for advice from his peers, he explains: “My parents are of the view [that] as foreigners, we are allowed to say bismallah [in the name of God] and eat any meat. It occurred to me [that] I should not be eating with my parents as they use meat I consider haram.” This is no minor matter for the freshman: “Please respond as quickly as possible as my tactic has been to eat outside and not at home till I get an answer.”

Following his arrival at university in September 2005, Abdulmutallab’s discourse also becomes more political. There is every reason to suspect that this is related to the milieu in which he now finds himself (on which more later), while his first trip to Yemen in the months immediately previous may have also been a factor. In February 2006, Abdulmutallab expounds at length the efficacy of anti-war demonstrations, arguing that “recruitment into the British Army has hit an all time low” and “the British and American governments will at least now hesitate, and not hasten...
to go to war with Syria or Iran."³⁰ In March 2006 the forum discusses “The Road to Guantanamo,” a British film narrating the story of the “Tipton Three.”³¹ When a member questions the film’s version of events, Abdulmutallab refers him to a UCL Islamic Society webpage containing an interview with Yvonne Ridley, the British journalist and prominent anti-war activist, who has frequently voiced support for the Taliban and Hamas.³² Pointing to Ridley’s experiences as a captive of the Taliban, he notes “how humane[ly] she was treated relative to Guantanamo detainees.”³³

In March 2006, Abdulmutallab stopped posting on the forum. He resurfaced in January 2007, but tarried for a mere handful of contributions. We can only speculate as to the causes of this considerable lifestyle change, but it seems likely that by this time his involvement in the UCL Islamic Society had taken him onto an altogether more worldly and active plane. His penultimate posting, on January 26, 2007, was a promotion for the Islamic Society’s “War on Terror Week.” He writes of “the death of thousands of innocent lives” and “thousands more detained illegally without trial or judgment.”³⁴ In these postings, Abdulmutallab—once a sedentary school boy, absorbed by the chimerical world of the online community of believers—has all but vanished. Now he has reinvented himself as a man of action.

**From the Brotherhood to Jihad**

**BORN IN LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO TO A FAMILY OF YEMENI DESCENT, SHAYKH Anwar al-Awlaki apparently began his Islamist intellectual life as a committed follower of the Muslim Brotherhood. In his own accounts of his Islamic education, Awlaki names a number of Ikhwani teachers and institutes that helped mould his understanding of Islam. In an August 2008 blog, responding to questions about his Islamic education, Awlaki claims that he “benefited from the teachings of Shaykh Abdul Majid al-Zindani.”³⁵ Among other things, Zindani is the rector of the Eman University in Yemen and the head of the Shurah Committee of Islah, the Yemeni wing of the Muslim Brotherhood.³⁶ Awlaki also wrote that in 2002 he was “given permission from the administration of the University of Eman in Yemen to attend any class at any level.”³⁷

Awlaki’s active role in the Muslim Brotherhood network can be traced to at least the early 1990s, when he was Vice President of the Charitable Society for Social Welfare, the U.S. branch of a charity founded by his former teacher Zindani.³⁸ Between 2001-2002, he served as the imam at the Dar al-Hijrah Mosque in Falls Church, Virginia, which is widely recognized as a hub for the *Ikhwan’s* activities in the United
States.\textsuperscript{39} The 9/11 Commission Report also quotes FBI sources that alleged that Awlaki had strong connections with the Brotherhood’s U.S.-based Hamas fundraising charity, the Holy Land Foundation.\textsuperscript{40} In one of his blog posts, Awlaki also mentions that in the late 1980s and early 1990s he held a number of talks with high level members of the Ikhwan about Islamist participation in democratic elections.\textsuperscript{41}

Beyond his organizational links to the Brotherhood, Awlaki’s early lectures suggest a close ideological affinity with the movement. In the days following the September 11, 2001 attacks, he expressed sympathy and support for Palestinian terrorist groups, telling a reader on Islam Online “these are freedom fighters fighting an illegal occupation.”\textsuperscript{42} In the same interview, he strongly suggested Israeli involvement in September 11, claiming that the actual Arab Muslim hijackers had been framed. Support—both financial and rhetorical—for terrorist operations in Israel and a conspiratorial view of 9/11 are a major preoccupation of the Brotherhood and other “soft Islamist” movements such as the Jamaat-e-Islami.

In a January 2009 open letter to President Obama, leading Islamist theologians including Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Qazi Hussein Ahmed (the former emir of the Jamaat-e-Islami) referred to the jihads in Israel, Afghanistan and Iraq as a resistance to “the aggression, injustice and tyranny practiced or sponsored by the United States.”\textsuperscript{43} The only solution to achieve world peace was “to end occupation and return to the peoples their rights and sovereignty.”\textsuperscript{44} On the subject of September 11, the letter made precisely the same claim as Awlaki: “The events of the 11th of September 2001 were nothing but fabricated drama by some influential forces in America in coordination with Israeli Mossad.”\textsuperscript{45} Such theories are not the sole preserve of the Muslim Brotherhood, of course, but other aspects of Awlaki’s early discourse provide powerful corroborating evidence of the movement’s influence.

In a 2001 lecture in the United States, “Tolerance: A Hallmark of Muslim Character,” Awlaki addressed a number of conventionally Ikwhani themes, including the current weak state of the umma, or “Muslim Nation,” and the importance of drawing lessons from the time of the Prophet in order to unify and strengthen the Islamic nation. He identifies two types of Islamic tolerance: that toward other religious groups and that among Muslims. The modern relevance of the former is quickly dismissed: “When you look at Muslims driven out of their homes and their land invaded and then you tell them to be tolerant: it doesn’t really make a lot of sense.”\textsuperscript{46} Instead, the majority of the talk is devoted to the “fiqh of priorities,” where Awlaki criticizes Muslims for attaching importance to small and insignificant disagreements while ignoring the major problems faced by the umma. The fiqh of priorities is an issue which the Brotherhood, and Qaradawi in particular, have also emphasized. Writing on this subject, Qaradawi uses a strikingly similar example to that given by Awlaki in his lecture. In his 1990 treatise, Priorities of the Islamic Movement...
in the Coming Phase, Qaradawi writes, “It is a pity that we ask for instance about the blood of a gnat, and do not care about the shedding of al-Hussein’s blood.”47 Similarly, in his talk Awlaki refers to a story where a delegation of Iraqis from Kufa visit Mecca for the hajj and ask Abdallah ibn Umar if their prayers will be spoiled were they to kill a mosquito. Awlaki notes the response: “You kill the grandson of Hussein bin Ali, and now you are asking about killing mosquitoes?”48

In 2002, Awlaki gave a lecture at a JIMAS conference in Leicester, England, which mirrored many of Qaradawi’s teachings of the previous decade.49 In “Lessons from the Companions: Living as a Minority,” Awlaki again echoes Qaradawi’s Priorities of the Islamic Movement. In the book, Qaradawi stresses the role played by Western Muslims in conducting dawa (proselytizing) through “organized, collective work, undertaken by the people, to restore Islam to the leadership of society.”50 In his 2002 lecture, Awlaki speaks about the importance of “working collectively” in almost identical terms, reminding his audience that “We cannot march forward unless we are organized.”51

He also specifically referred to the importance of creating a jamaa (community) that will be stronger and more effective than any individual efforts to spread Islam. Notably, the term jamaa was used in this context by none other than Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. In The Message of the Teachings, Banna explained that the creation of a jamaa, or community of like-minded Ikhwanis, was an essential step in the development of a truly Islamic society.52

Perhaps most significantly, Awlaki’s emphasis on organized dawa as the key to Islamic revival stands in direct contrast to the ideology of al-Qaeda, which seeks to change the global balance of power by unleashing indiscriminate violence on Western cities. Indeed, Qaradawi’s doctrine of wasatiyya (middle way) represents, as its name implies, a rejection of this approach, favoring a peaceful (at least with respect to the homelands of Western countries) yet persistent program of delegitimizing secularism while simultaneously offering Islam as the only viable alternative. Awlaki made precisely this point to his Leicester audience:

The wisdom comes in on how (the method with which) the package is delivered. Rather than using a hammer to knock on the door and then throwing the package into the face of the person who opens the door, the door should be knocked on politely and the package delivered in a polite manner.53

This metaphor would seem to represent a denunciation of global jihadism as crude and ineffective next to the smooth and plausible proselytizing of the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, it is often overlooked that Awlaki received heavy criticism...
from Abdullah al-Faisal, an influential jihadist preacher, for his initial rejection of *takfir* (excommunication)—a core element of al-Qaeda’s ideology. Branding him a purveyor of “CIA Islam,” al-Faisal even declared takfir on Awlaki, deeming his murder permissible.

As we have seen, this is not to say that Awlaki ever opposed violent jihad *per se*, but rather that his interpretation of jihad and its requirements under present circumstances was emphatically Ikhwani. In 2003, Awlaki released “The Story of Ibn al-Akwa,” a lecture series based on the *Book of Jihad* written by a 14th century scholar, Ibn Nuhaas. It is regarded as a classic work on jihad—and is a favorite text of the Muslim Brotherhood. It was hailed by Abdullah Azzam as “the best book on Jihad,” and listed by Hasan al-Banna as essential reading on the 1940s *Ikhwan* members’ syllabus. Headings such as “Jihad is the most beloved deed to Allah,” “The *mujahid* is the greatest of all people,” and “The pinnacle of Islam is jihad,” give a sense of the book’s content.

Interestingly, Awlaki began the lecture with a disclaimer affirming its wholly academic and theoretical nature—a mark of caution that he later dispensed with—before warmly citing Sayyid Qutb’s maxim: “Our words are dead until we give them life with our blood.”

Awlaki then criticizes modern interpretations of jihad as an inner struggle: “Nowadays, it is common to find among Muslims the understanding that jihad is primarily *jihad al-nafs* (internal struggle) and the secondary meaning is the fighting of the *kuffar* (non-believers).” He rejects a popular hadith, “We returned from the lesser *jihad* (battle) to the greater *jihad* (*jihad* of the soul),” calling it a fabrication. Instead, the true Islamic meaning of jihad is fighting in the cause of Allah (*fisabeel ilah*).

The rejection of the notion that an inner struggle of the soul is the greater jihad is a common theme among modern Islamist ideologues, not least Hassan al-Banna, who in his *Book of Jihad* writes: “Many Muslims today mistakenly believe that fighting the enemy is *jihad asghar* (a lesser jihad) and that fighting one’s ego is *jihad akbar* (a greater jihad).”

Soon before his move to Yemen, Awlaki delivered another lecture series that included unmistakably Ikhwani themes, stressing the importance of the all-encompassing Islamic identity and directly drawing on the distinctly Qutbist interpretation of *jahilliya* as not just the historical pre-Islamic period but a timeless concept.

It was in 2005 that Awlaki’s public work began to suggest a stronger affinity with al-Qaeda. This was the year he published his exegesis of *Constants in the Path of Jihad*, a book by Salafi scholar Yusuf al Uwayree. In contrast to his 2003 lecture on Ibn Nuhaas, Awlaki no longer saw the need to include a disclaimer. Also, unlike Nuhaas, Uwayree was a modern jihadist who learned his trade fighting for the mujahidin against the Soviets in Afghanistan and his text is a contemporary jihadist tract,
explicitly applying many of Nuhaas’ ancient teachings to modern times. It may have been about this time, in the summer of 2005, that the 18-year-old Abdulmutallab first encountered Awlaki. The chronology of their first meeting is unclear, although in January 2010 Awlaki confirmed to a Yemeni journalist that “Umar Farouk is one of my students.” While enrolled in the Arabic Institute of Sanaa, Abdulmutallab attended lectures at Zindani’s al-Eman University, where Awlaki had begun speaking soon after his return to Yemen the previous year. If he did attend Awlaki’s lectures, Abdulmutallab would have absorbed a rapidly hardening jihadist discourse. By August 2006, the Yemeni authorities were sufficiently perturbed by the shaykh’s activities to secure his incarceration, which would last until December 2007.

Writing of his time in prison, Awlaki names Sayyid Qutb’s *In the Shade of the Quran* as one of the books that “carried me through and offered me solace during that period.” In a review of the book on his blog, he suggests that, along with Qutb’s political manifesto *Milestones*, this work is crucial to his understanding of Islam and its holy book. This growing adoration of Qutb reflects Awlaki’s shift from Qaradawist wasatiyya to a more radical strand of Brotherhood thought. From there, the transition to jihadism was a painless one.

In an August 2008 blog, “A Question about the Method of Establishing Khilafa,” Awlaki openly rejects the Muslim Brotherhood approach to Islamizing the West, now wholly embracing the al-Qaeda strategy. Awlaki lists four different approaches to the establishment of a universal caliphate: *tarbiyah* (Islamic education) of the *umma* until it is able to establish the caliphate; participation in democratic systems so as to change secular societies from within; Hizb ut-Tahrir’s approach of raising awareness of the importance of the caliphate and searching for *nusrah* (help); and fighting in the path of Allah. The first two strategies are typical of the Muslim Brotherhood’s gradualist approach, which only a few years earlier he would likely have accepted. By now, however, his strategic outlook has changed. Instead, he rejects the first suggestion on the basis that it negates “the duty of jihad” and rejects democratic participation and infiltration as un-Islamic: “It is not our way. It is the way of the Jews and the munafiqueen [polytheists]...we make our intentions open.” Crucially, moreover, the jihadist obligation is no longer merely defensive: “Our position is that we will implement the rule of Allah on earth by the tip of the sword whether the masses like it or not.”

From this period onwards, Awlaki’s pronouncements became ever more aligned with al-Qaeda’s—and increasingly operational in their perspective. By December 2008 he was in correspondence with al-Shabaab, a Somali militant group linked to al-Qaeda. In a blog congratulating the group on their successful establishment of sharia through jihad rather than democratic means, he exclaimed, “The ballot has failed us but the bullet has not.” Shortly thereafter, he posted al-Shabaab’s response
on his blog, where the group thanks him for his ongoing support, referring to him as their “beloved shaykh.” Months later, *The New York Times* reported that Awlaki’s sermons had helped to inspire a Somali student in America to join al-Shabaab.

In January 2009, he released a document entitled “44 Ways to Support Jihad,” presenting the global jihad as a Clausewitzian total war which calls upon man, woman and child to do all in their capacity to assist the mujahidin, from providing them with financial support to helping their families. He also utilizes the Salafi-Jihadi interpretation of *al-wala wa-l-bara*, as developed by Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi, explaining to the reader,

> The hatred of kuffar is a central element of our military creed. We need to realize that Allah will not grant us victory as long as we still have some love towards His enemies in our hearts. The spiritual condition of total loyalty towards Allah and total animosity towards his enemies was a necessary precursor to the judgment of Allah between His prophets and their disbelieving nations. Never was victory attained by the Prophets of Allah and their people until their loyalty towards Allah was complete and their disassociation with the kuffar was complete.

Between 2001 and 2009, there was a clear progression in Awlaki’s public pronouncements. He began with extensive connections to the international Muslim Brotherhood movement, and espoused views almost identical to leading Brotherhood ideologues, both past and present. He recommended classic Ikhwani texts in his lectures and generally avoided any direct incitement to violence in what he regarded as non-Muslim countries. Although his views on “defensive jihad” in “Muslim lands” remained consistent throughout, his strategic vision for the spread of Islam in the West gradually changed. Whereas in 2002 he discussed the peaceful and polite delivery of the “dawa package,” by 2005 he began to suggest that immediate violence was the only true path.

It is difficult to assess exactly why Awlaki transformed from an Ikhwani into an al-Qaeda jihadist, and a multitude of factors were likely at work. A frequent reason given by some of his former allies and supporters for Awlaki’s motivation is the 2003 Iraq War, although he has never made this claim himself. Now his speeches often cite what he regards as the atrocities of the Iraq war, but even before the invasion he disparaged the UN sanctions on Iraq, lamenting the supposed indifference of the world’s Muslims to their coreligionists being “choked to death.” Indeed, he did not begin supporting al-Qaeda openly until some years after the invasion. Another oft-cited reason for his shift is his time in a Yemeni prison, but again, this is not a claim
he has made for himself.\textsuperscript{75} His motivations are likely to have been diverse; pressure from takfiri Islamists, of the kind detailed above, may also have played a role.

One of the traits Awlaki shares with numerous al-Qaeda ideologues before him is that he began his career as a disciple of the Muslim Brotherhood and, like Qutb after Banna, took these teachings to a violent conclusion. The change in Awlaki was not one of core beliefs—even in his early days he supported militants who sought to create an Islamic state in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and other regions he defined as Islamic. He also supported the idea of a caliphate that would eventually encompass the entire world. The real change lay in his vision or method of how best to achieve this.

**Rolling Out the Red Carpet**

After September 11, 2001, repeated FBI investigations eventually caused Awlaki to seek refuge in his Yemeni tribal base in 2004. Prior to this, however, he spent approximately a year (between late 2002 and early 2004) in the United Kingdom, the European hub of the *Ikhwan*, where he was welcomed with open arms. As well as his conspicuously Ikhwani outlook, the treatment Awlaki received from the Muslim Brotherhood/Jamaat-e-Islami network upon his arrival in the UK reflected his strong connection with the movement. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that his reception was unprecedented—to this day no other foreign-based preacher (apart from Yusuf al-Qaradawi) has compared.

His ideological partners, the Brotherhood-aligned Muslim Association of Britain (MAB),\textsuperscript{76} the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS),\textsuperscript{77} Jamaat-e-Islami’s Islamic Forum Europe (IFE), and East London Mosque (ELM)\textsuperscript{78} immediately sought to promote him among British Muslims as a role-model.

**The Muslim Brotherhood**

The arrival of Anwar al-Awlaki caused such excitement on the British Islamist scene that news of the commotion reached Parliament. In December 2003, Louise Ellman MP informed the House of Commons:

> It is time that the spotlight fell on the Muslim Association of Britain, particularly the key figures, such as Azzam Tamimi, Kamal el Helbawy, Anas Al-Tikriti and Mohammed Sawalha. All of them are connected to the terrorist organisation Hamas. The Muslim Association of Britain itself is a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood—an extremist
fundamentalist organisation founded in Egypt in 1928, and the spir-
itudal ideologue of all Islamic terror organisations.

[...] In June 2003, the Muslim Association of Britain organised a series
of meetings with an American imam, Anwar Al Awlaki, as guest
speaker. That gentleman is reportedly wanted for questioning by the
FBI in connection with the 9/11 al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on New
York and Washington.79

This was a remarkable “grand tour,” which saw Awlaki championed by the MAB over
the length of the British Isles, from London to Aberdeen. The campaign was entitled
“To Be a Muslim Think Globally and Act Locally”—then the official MAB slogan—
reflecting the grassroots proselytizing ambitions of the Ikhwan in Europe.80 One of
the lectures in the series specifically targeted British Muslims on campus. “A Day to
Remember: Muslim Students...The Remaking of a Great Nation,” was held in conjunc-
tion with a number of British universities, including the School of Oriental and African
Studies, Imperial College, King’s College and the London School of Economics.81

Similarly, Awlaki was a “distinguished guest” at the FOSIS annual conference,
held at the University of Nottingham on June 19-22, 2003, where his fellow speakers
included leading European Brotherhood figures Kemal el-Helbawy and Anas al-
Tikriti, then a Director of the MAB.82

The Jamaat-e-Islami

On October 12, 2003, Awlaki was a keynote speaker at the “ExpoIslamia”
event held by the IFE, where he appeared alongside Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Tariq
Ramadan.83 The IFE is a subsidiary organization to the East London Mosque (ELM),
which itself first hosted Awlaki at a 2003 event called “Stop Police Terror.” Speaking
on the familiar theme of a Western “war on Islam,” Awlaki suggested to the audience
that it would be unacceptable, under any circumstances, for them to report fellow
Muslims to the police:

A Muslim is a brother of a Muslim, he does not oppress him, he does
not betray him and he does not hand him over... You don’t hand over
a Muslim to the enemies...84

Despite Awlaki’s post-2005 public support for al-Qaeda’s global jihad, he remained
a popular figure in UK Islamist circles. In 2006, then Scottish MAB spokesman,
Osama Saeed, voiced support for the cleric on his widely read blog. Protesting his arrest in Yemen, Saeed wrote: “If you want further evidence on what a crock the war on terror is, or motivation to do something about it, this should galvanise you… Imam Anwar al-Awlaki was originally hounded in the US because two of the 9/11 bombers happened to pray at his mosque. Many of my Muslim readers will either know him personally or have heard his lectures. He preached nothing but peace, and I pray he will be able to do so again.”

Azad Ali, a prominent IFE member, was equally generous in his praise of Awlaki well into 2008. In a blog on the IFE website on November 5, Ali described Awlaki as “one of my favourite speakers and scholars... I really do love him for the sake of Allah, he has an uncanny way of explaining things.” The article even contained a link to Awlaki’s blog, which by now included the aforementioned article advocating the establishment of the caliphate “at the tip of the sword.” It seems unlikely that Ali was unaware of this content. On November 19, 2008, he wrote: “Reading his blogs, one cannot help but feel his frustration at the constant denial of legitimate Islamic principles. Worse is the complete incompetence of some Muslims to distinguish between jihad and acts of murder.” While praising and disseminating Awlaki’s work, Ali apparently did not deem it necessary to make even a cautionary mention of his more violent, al-Qaeda inspired views.

In a particularly revealing episode, the East London Mosque played host to Awlaki again in January 2009, this time via video-link. The event was titled “The End of Time... A New Beginning!” and promotional flyers featured a crumbling statue of Liberty set against an apocalyptic New York skyline. In the run-up to the event, two British newspapers reported Awlaki’s impending video-lecture at the mosque, detailing his extreme views and alleged links to al-Qaeda. The coverage led then Shadow Justice Minister Dominic Grieve to publically express his concern at the mosque’s decision. Nevertheless, the East London Mosque refused to cancel Awlaki’s appearance—or to condemn his beliefs. Rather, a spokesman protested that “Mr Awlaki has not been proven guilty in a court of law. Everyone is entitled to their point of view.” The event went ahead as planned.

Despite this furor, Awlaki was once more invited to broadcast a speech from Yemen, at an August 2009 event sponsored by two British pressure groups: Cage-prisoners and the Cordoba Foundation. His appearance, which was set to take place at the Kensington and Chelsea Town Hall in Central London, was cancelled only by a last-minute intervention from the local council.

It was not until the emergence of his second major association with terrorist violence that British Islamists began to cede their support for Awlaki. In the wake of the November 2009 Fort Hood shootings, as details of Major Hasan’s relationship with Awlaki began to appear across the international media, British Islamists scrambled...
to dissociate from the cleric. The official line, from many prominent individuals and organizations, was that Awlaki’s radicalization had been an insidious process that had caught them unawares.\textsuperscript{95} As we have seen, Awlaki’s transition from “soft Islamism” to violent jihad would have been obvious to any regular consumer of his output. In some cases, individual organizations had been specifically confronted over Awlaki’s record and yet continued to hold him aloft as a learned scholar. Clearly the support for Awlaki in Britain meant one of two things: either the organizations in question knowingly extolled an al-Qaeda ideologue, or they failed to identify the dangerous radical who had become their figurehead.

The UK Islamist Milieu

\textbf{Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab arrived on this scene in September 2005.} He came during a storm of Islamist activity in the UK. Events and campaigns organized by \textit{Ikhwan} and Jamaat-e-Islami inspired groups were taking place almost on a weekly basis, with their influence over British Islam steadily increasing.

British Islamists utilized the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, along with post September 11 anti-terror legislation, to imply that Western governments were engaged in a “war on Islam and Muslims,” both in the West and in the Middle East. Western Muslims, according to the Islamists, were duty bound to stand up for their religion and fight back using non-violent methods. The above-mentioned “Stop Police Terror” lecture, given by Awlaki at the East London Mosque in 2003, was part of a broader campaign of the same name which ran until November 2006.\textsuperscript{96} Among the listed supporters of the campaign was Awlaki himself, as well as the Muslim Association of Britain, the East London Mosque and a collection of British university Islamic societies. The stated aims of the campaign were to encourage Muslims to take action against “anti-terrorist police terror” and to raise awareness about “the deteriorating situation in the UK and the scale of arrests, raids and abuse meted out [against Muslims] by Anti-Terrorist Police.”\textsuperscript{97} The campaign statement also included a clear warning: “Britain’s Muslims, as a community, will refuse to cooperate with the law enforcement authorities if this abuse continues.”\textsuperscript{98} In 2005, at the height of the campaign, then MAB director Anas al-Tikriti claimed that the West was engaged in an “ideological, idea-driven war against Islam.”\textsuperscript{99}

During this time, FOSIS ran its own campaign in conjunction with “Stop Police Terror.” Their statements on this issue were even more explicit:

The persecution of Muslims in Britain began even before 9-11 with the introduction of the Terrorism Act 2000. By the end of April 2005,
over 750 Muslims had been arrested under the Terrorism Act. Just over 100 were charged with only three convicted of any terrorism related offence. In the same time, tens of thousands of Muslims have been stopped and searched; hundreds of homes have been raided, Islamic charities have been shut down, over a dozen Muslim men were interned without charge and are now under control orders, and the community has become demonized and ostracized by elements of the media and the government. Security services are making a concerted effort to recruit informers from the Muslim community particularly on campus.

Whereas previously, it was Muslims themselves under attack, now the agenda [is] to attack Islam, its principles and values as well as its political system of *shariah* and *khilafah* are under attack. New laws making it an offence to associate with “wrongdoers” together with the government’s policy of dividing the community into moderates and extremists aim to divide and weaken the Muslim community. The relative concept of ‘extremism’ is being used to condemn Muslims from very diverse political viewpoints.100

Although there was no call for violence, the notion of a Western “war on Islam” is widely identified as one of the primary recruitment tools of global jihadist groups like al-Qaeda.101

Abdulmutallab was thus immersed in an activist environment that appears to have given meaning and direction to his preexisting religious austerity and personal discontent. From his earliest days on the online forum, he had been looking forward to the camaraderie to be found on campus: “I hope to get over my loneliness when I go to university... where there are usually Islamic groups [and] clubs with good Muslims.”102 Once there, Abdulmutallab threw himself into the activities of the UCL Islamic Society. Within a year he was its president, and as such also led the UCL chapter of FOSIS.103

FOSIS was established in 1962 to “represent” and “serve” the needs of Muslim students in higher education across the UK and Ireland.104 According to the memoirs of a former member, in the early 1970s FOSIS events featured regular appearances by Said Ramadan, son-in-law to Hasan al-Banna and a transformational Brotherhood activist, and Khurshid Ahmad, a leading light of Jamaat-e-Islami and the party’s current Vice President. When in 1969 Abu al-Ala al Maududi, founder of the Jamaat, visited London, FOSIS organized a “huge reception” in his honor.105

FOSIS remains a vehicle for revivalist activism to this day. For instance, in 2006 FOSIS was heavily involved in an event which epitomized British Islamism at the
The “IslamExpo” event in London was billed as the “biggest Islamic cultural event ever witnessed.” The directors of Islam Expo included: Mohammed Sawalha, then director of the MAB,\(^{107}\) and described by the BBC as a “fugitive Hamas commander;” Anas al-Tikriti, also then a director of the MAB\(^ {108}\) as well as the Cordoba Foundation;\(^ {109}\) and Azzam Tamimi, MAB spokesman and UK-based Hamas envoy who famously told the BBC in 2004 of his desire to carry out a suicide attack against Israel.\(^ {110}\) Billed to address the predominantly Muslim audience were leading Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami figures Jamal Badawi and Qazi Hussein Ahmed. Many of the panel discussions were centered on Islamist themes such as the former glories of the caliphate and the importance of wearing the hijab.\(^ {111}\)

In another example, the 2007 FOSIS Annual Conference, which Abdulmutallab might well have attended, also featured an impressive collection of Islamist leaders, not least Shaykh Rashid El Ghannouchi, head of the Tunisian Al-Nahda movement, who had previously signed a *bayyan* calling on the insurgency in Iraq to maintain its “honorable resistance” against “the filth of occupation.”\(^ {112}\) The declaration had received national press coverage at the time.\(^ {113}\)

The UCL Islamic Society maintained close ties with FOSIS during Abdulmutallab’s time at the University. They organized a week of joint charity events, and Abdulmutallab’s friend and predecessor as president received a senior position at FOSIS soon after graduation.\(^ {114}\) More importantly, the Islamic Society toed the ideological line projected nationally by FOSIS. From the start, Abdulmutallab immersed himself in a culture that privileged almost exclusively Salafist preachers and activists influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami. In November 2005, the Islamic Society hosted a number of such speakers, most notably Abdur Raheem Green and Taji Mustafa.\(^ {115}\) Abdulmutallab’s presidential tenure followed the same pattern: in December 2007, “Pearls of Wisdom Week” featured Abu Usama and Murtaza Khan, both of whom had figured in a high-profile television exposé screened earlier that year.\(^ {116}\) Secretly-filmed footage showed the former instructing a congregation that “Allah has created the woman deficient” and “take that homosexual man and throw him from the mountain.” The same exposé portrayed the latter describing Jews and Christians as “enemies” whom “the wrath of God is upon.”\(^ {117}\)

This brings us full circle to “War on Terror Week,” the January 2007 climax of Abdulmutallab’s presidency of the Islamic Society. According to an eyewitness account of the event, proceedings began with a video of the World Trade Center collapsing and gun battles between mujahidin and NATO soldiers in Afghanistan. Islamic Society members wore the orange jumpsuits of Guantanamo detainees. Speaking to *The New York Times*, the witness stated, “It was quite tense in the theater, because I think lots of people were shocked by how extreme it was. It seemed to me like it was brainwashing, like they were trying to indoctrinate people.”\(^ {118}\)
Among the speakers were Asim Qureshi and Moazzam Begg, both senior members of Cageprisoners, a registered company that purports to exist “solely to raise awareness of the plight of the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and other detainees held as part of the War on Terror.” Their spiritual heroes and campaign causes célèbres include convicted terrorist Ali Al-Tamimi, whom they refer to as “our beloved shaykh,” and Anwar al-Awlaki himself. At the time of their appearance at UCL, Qureshi and Begg were engaged in raising support for Awlaki, who was then incarcerated in Yemen. Despite the recent revelations about Awlaki’s connections to the last two terrorist incidents in the United States, at the time of writing Cageprisoners continues to provide favorable coverage of him on their website, including his Islamic book reviews, a video message censored for broadcast by the British Government, and an article describing “Imam Anwar” as an “inspirational” figure.

Cageprisoners typifies the British Islamist penchant for the “defensive jihad” of the Taliban in Afghanistan, insurgents in Iraq, and Lebanese, Palestinian and Kashmiri militants. Qureshi, Senior Researcher at Cageprisoners, holds that the actions carried out by these groups are sanctioned by the Geneva Convention as well as religiously mandated. Speaking about the Israel-Palestine conflict to students at London’s Queen Mary University in 2007, Qureshi insisted that the al-Aqsa mosque was “definitely worth dying for.” When discussing the legitimacy of fighting jihad against Israel and in Iraq, he told his audience that “in terms of the law there’s no problem with doing it whatsoever—and, in terms of Islamically, of course not.”

This is a view he has continued to propagate among British Muslims. In January 2010 he wrote:

...a common theme that the team at Cageprisoners has found is that many Muslims believe that our brothers and sisters in faith fighting for their survival in various parts of the world have a legitimate right to do so—that policy of self defense from an Islamic perspective is known as jihad.

Qureshi argues that since this concept has been “recognized by the Western world” in 1980s Afghanistan and 1990s Bosnia, the time has come for “public debate”—“by those who have an interest in these issues”—to clarify and refine the “limitations and justifications” of jihad:

Only then can there be a meeting of the opposing views—it is only through this mechanism that we have any hope of persuading, in light of the grievances mentioned by the 7/7 bombers, Abdulmuttalib and others like him, that the ends can never justify the means. It would
seem common sense that an open and honest debate about jihad is very much required, indeed, the discussion on jihad is the solution.\(^{125}\)

At a London Hizb ut-Tahrir rally in 2006, Qureshi explained his view of jihad in more bellicose terms:

So when we see the example of our brothers and sisters fighting in Chechnya, Iraq, Palestine, Kashmir, Afghanistan then we know where the example lies. When we see Hezbollah defeating the armies of Israel, we know what the solution is and where the victory lies. We know that it is incumbent upon all of us to support the jihad of our brothers and sisters in these countries when they are facing the oppression of the west.\(^{126}\)

Similarly, Moazzam Begg, director of Cageprisoners, compares contemporary young British Muslims who join the Taliban insurgency to mujahidin who fought the Soviets in the late 1970s. In an essay on jihad, published in the 2008 edition of the Cordoba Foundation’s journal, he notes, “By consensus of the Islamic schools of thought, jihad becomes an individual obligation, like prayer and fasting, on Muslim men and women when their land is occupied by foreign enemies.” Somewhat obliquely, he adds, “That obligation extends to neighboring lands until the enemy has been expelled.”\(^{127}\) Warming to his theme, Begg continues:

Although in the West jihad is often seen as terrorism it is correct to describe it as tourism. Prophet Muhammad said, ‘The tourism of my nation is jihad.’ This is one reason why many Muslims from thousands of miles away travelled to places as far and wide as Palestine, Chechnya, Kashmir and Afghanistan.

If resisting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was jihad, if the [sic] repelling the massacres by the Serbs in Bosnia was jihad, then how can resisting the current occupation of these Muslims [sic] lands be anything else?\(^{128}\)

In the same essay, he praises the work of Abdullah Azzam, referring to his book *In Defense of Muslim Lands* as a “magisterial discourse.”\(^{129}\) Begg glosses over the ideological overlap between “defensive” and “offensive” *jihad*, failing to mention that Azzam also called for Islam to be spread throughout the world, violently where necessary.

Although Begg has not openly supported offensive jihad, Cageprisoners views
fighting in defense of an “Islamic” land as a core principle of Islam and an individual duty for Muslims. Increasingly, such views are widely espoused in Britain. In February 2009, a group made up predominantly of Ikhwanis, a large proportion of which were from Yemen, met in Istanbul under the banner of the “Global Anti-Aggression Campaign.” Their statement was an unequivocal condemnation of the Palestinian Authority, for having “given up the choice of jihad in the way of Allah.” Instead, it is incumbent on the umma to “carry on with the jihad and Resistance against the occupier until the liberation of all of Palestine.” Yet, as we have seen, the implications of “defensive jihad” are elastic. The statement also called on the umma to “regard everyone standing with the Zionist entity, whether countries, institutions or individuals, as providing a substantial contribution to the crimes and brutality of this entity; the position towards him is the same as towards this usurping entity.”130 The statement was signed by four prominent British Muslims, including Daud Abdullah, Deputy Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain131 and Mohammed Sawalha.132

Conclusion

Each journey to jihadist violence is unique: no two travelers share the same path. But the diversity of the radicalized is set against one constant: extreme ideas that can form the basis for extreme actions. Ideas, of course, are fluid: subject to change and sometimes volatile fusion.

The distinction between violent and non-violent extremism—in this case “hard” and “soft” Islamism—can at times be reduced to no more than equivocation. On December 28, 2009, the Muslim Council of Britain issued a press release that condemned “the alleged attempted bombing aboard an airliner in Detroit” and “urged calm on all sides.” Secretary-General Abdul Bari stated, “Terror and violence is not the way to convey a message however legitimate the cause may be. It is totally counter-productive.”133 Awlaki’s words echo here: “the wisdom comes in on how the package is delivered.” The implication might be that Abdulmutallab erred only in his chosen means to the agreed end.

The careers of Abdulmutallab and Anwar al-Awlaki remind us that individuals can slip beyond this porous boundary rapidly and very often unnoticed. That any particular strand of Islamist ideology can effectively block the shift to violence is at best uncertain. Rather, the evidence presented here suggests that religiously meritorious violence, once accepted under any circumstances, can take on a momentum of its own. Further, the shared principles of diverse forms of political Islam can, however innocently, provide an ideological firewall that obscures and underwrites the violent intentions of the minority.
NOTES


2. Abdulmutallab’s online postings were first collated by the NEFA Foundation. Filed by date, they are available at: http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/farouk1986.zip

3. For a thoughtful treatment of a similar case, see:

4. February 20, 2005. A note on transcription: minor spelling and grammatical errors in Abdulmutallab’s writing have been corrected for the sake of accessibility. Thus “dont” has been rendered “don’t,” and “i” as “I,” and so on.


9. “Then don’t forget it is the [Saudi] government that allowed the US to come into the country to ‘protect’ them when Allah says in the Quran to not take the kafirs as Auliya [protectors].” May 9, 2005.


12. “…almost every good Muslim gets lonely at some point. This I believe is because really there are many Muslims but most are just Muslims by name who do not practice the deen [religion] earnestly, leaving the few good Muslims alone.” (January 29, 2005); “I myself [originally [from] a Muslim country and schooling elsewhere with several Muslims] have met hundreds of Muslims but [have found] no good friend.” (January 29, 2005); “…most of the Muslims around are just Muslim by name and do not sincerely practice their religion. Hence the few good Muslims are left lonely.” (January 30, 2005).


18. “…dreams could be from Shaytun and might deceive you” (February 16, 2005); “I read somewhere that at times, Shaytun plays about with our minds to make us uncomfortable…” (February 19, 2005); “It is true that the jinn exist as they are mentioned in the Quran, but realize that jinn can only do to you what Allah wills it to do.” (February 20, 2005).


21. “Sudais’ Quran recitation is the best I think, but after you listen to it for long, and then comes Shuraim’s turn, Shuraim’s seems better. Just fantastic!!!” (March 23, 2005; see also February 19, 2005, May 9, 2005).
22. “I usually go to Central Masjid London in Regent’s Park” (February 17, 2005).
24. He passionately dislikes Arsenal, the London soccer team (February 16, 2005), and is not above
debating Liverpool’s reliance on Steven Gerrard (February 14, 2005) or Juventus’ perennial under-
achievement (February 18, 2005).
25. February 20, 2005.
27. This comment recalls the famous exhortation of Abdullah al-Faisal, a preacher mentioned by Ab-
dulmutallab: “You have to learn how to shoot. You have to learn how to fly planes, drive tanks and
you have to learn how to load your guns and to use missiles.” See:
28. “I think some instruments (I don’t know which specific ones) are allowed to be used during festive
occasions for women only. There is a hadith where the Prophet mentioned... [that] muslims will call
certain things that are haram... among the things mentioned [are] wine and musical instruments.
We all know wine is haram, so if musical instruments [are] also on the list, then it seems to be
haram too. I fear we are at this time now as Muslims are calling it names like Art, interlude, back-
ground sound...and we have people saying it is permissible.” November 15, 2005.
31. The film won the Silver Bear for Direction for Michael Winterbottom and Mat Whitecross at the 56th
Berlin International Film Festival. It told the story of the “Tipton Three”—three British youths
apprehended in Afghanistan in 2001 and held at Guantanamo Bay for three years. The youths
protested their innocence, claiming that they had traveled to Afghanistan in 2001 for a mixture of
humanitarian work, tourism and recreation: “Aid work was like probably 5% of it. Our main reason
was just to go and sightsee really and smoke some dope.” The film, which vividly conveyed the
youths’ suffering in Guantanamo but did little to challenge their version of events, caused an in-
ternational outcry.
   In 2007, on the Channel 4 program Lie Lab, Ruhal Ahmed, one of the “Tipton Three,” confessed that
he had in fact undergone weapons training at a Taliban training camp in Afghanistan. The revela-
tion received little media attention.
   http://www.counterpunch.org/ridley02152010.html; See also:
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ruF3h_hZSE8&feature=player_embedded.
35. al-Awlaki, A., “The Islamic Education of Shaikh Anwar al-Awlaki,” Anwar al-Awlaki’s blog, August
12, 2008.
36. Zindani signed a 2004 International Union for Muslim Scholars’ bayyan in support of the Iraq insurg-
ency in his capacity as the head of the Shurah Committee of Islah.
37. al-Awlaki, A., “The Islamic Education of Shaikh Anwar al-Awlaki,” Anwar al-Awlaki’s blog, August
12, 2008.
39. According to its website, the Dar al-Hijrah Mosque must include on its board the current Secretary
General of Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and the current President of the Muslim
ISNA and the MAS are two of the leading Ikhwan organizations in the United States. For more on this see: Merley, S., “The Muslim Brotherhood in the United States,” Research Monographs on the Muslim World, Series No. 2, Paper No. 3, Hudson Institute, April 2009.


44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.


54. In a talk given by al-Faisal during Awlaki’s time as Imam at the Rabat Mosque in San Diego, he condemned Awlaki for his Ikhwani take on takfir. Awlaki had argued that only God could judge Muslims, thus rejecting the al-Qaeda interpretation that Muslims can apply takfir on those who are deemed apostates. Speech available at: http://www.archive.org/details/CiaIslam-SheikhFaisalsTakfeerOfAnwarAwlaki.


58. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
72. See section on Awlaki in the UK for more on his MB connections.
73. See for example, Bunglawala, I., “Muslims Must Combat Hate Speech,” The Guardian: Comment is Free, 10 November, 2009.
75. See for example, Saeed, O., “Times run with Centre for Social Cohesion briefing,” Rolled-Up Trousers blog, 12 November, 2009.
76. Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank describe the MAB as a “Muslim Brotherhood Group,” see “The Unraveling: The jihadist revolt against bin Laden,” The New Republic, June 11, 2008.
77. An April 2009 report published by the British Government’s Department for Communities and Local Government notes that “the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) along with the Muslim Brotherhood were pioneers in developing student activism through the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS)...” See: The Pakistani Muslim Community in England: Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities in England (London: Department for Communities and Local Government, April 17, 2009).
78. In “Britain’s Islamic Republic,” a documentary aired on the UK’s Channel 4 on March 1, 2010, secret filming within the IFE premises revealed that followers were taught from Maududi’s texts. The IFE is a subsidiary organization of the ELM and, according to David Garbin, the ELM “has maintained close links with the Jamaat-e-Islami, largely through the Islamic Forum Europe.” See Garbin, D., “Bangladeshi diaspora in the UK: some observations on socio-cultural dynamics, religious trends and transnational politics,” Conference Human Rights and Bangladesh, June 17, 2005, School of African and Oriental Studies.
80. The relevant information has since been removed from the MAB website, but is still available in

81. The relevant information has since been removed from the MAB website, but is still available in archived form at http://web.archive.org/web/20030605155801/www.mabonline.net/branches/events/2bamuslim2003conf/campus2003conf.htm [accessed 11/10/2009].

82. The relevant information has since been removed from the MAB website, but is still available in archived form at http://web.archive.org/web/20030603164257/www.fosis.org.uk/activities/camp/camp03.htm [accessed 11/10/2009].


85. Saeed, O., “Imam Anwar arrested,” Rolled-Up Trousers Blog, November 7, 2006. Since the increased awareness of Awlaki’s extremism after Fort Hood, Saeed has removed this blog and copies are in possession of the authors. He now also claims that, at the time of writing this blog, Awlaki was not yet an extremist.

86. Ibid.

87. In the “Britain’s Islamic Republic” documentary, Azad Ali is filmed teaching a class and saying to his students that “Democracy, if it means at the expense of not implementing the sharia, of course no one agrees with that.”


90. After Major Nidal Hasan attacked Fort Hood in November 2009 and Awlaki’s connections with him were revealed, Ali’s praise for Awlaki was given some scrutiny by the media. It was only when the London Times questioned him about this in November 2009 that he denounced some of Awlaki’s views.


96. The campaign was later renamed “Stop Political Terror.”

98. Ibid.


106. As well as providing volunteers to help run the event, FOSIS also held four different workshops and seminars, for more see http://islamexpo.info/images/stories/programme_207061730.pdf [accessed 4/26/2010].

107. 2006 Annual Return 363a (ef) for Muslim Association of Britain Ltd, Companies House.

108. Ibid.


112. Full translation in authors’ possession. See:


114. UCL and FOSIS organized a series of charity events between October 22-28, 2007:


115. For event promotional material see http://www.uclisoc.com/list/index.php?f=archive&val=13&nl=1&opt=view [accessed 4/27/2010]. Abdur Raheem Green is a well-known Salafist convert. Taji Mustafa is a media representative for Hizb ut-Tahrir in Britain. The events also featured Murtaza Khan, for which see below.


117. “Dispatches: Undercover Mosque,” Channel 4, January 15, 2007. Khan also stated: “This whole delusion about the equality of women is a bunch of foolishness, there’s no such thing,” and described the AIDS virus as a “conspiracy” orchestrated by the World Health Organization and “Christian groups.”
   Among other things, the campaign asked CP supporters to “Write to the Yemeni Ambassador to UK, Mohamed Taha Mustafa, and urge him to work for the immediate release of Imam Anwar al-Awlaki,” and “Write to the Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett to make representations to her Yemeni counterparts to work for Imam Anwar al-Awlaki’s immediate release.” In the “sample letter,” provided by CP, Awlaki is referred to as a “prominent Muslim scholar.”
   The relationship between CP and Awlaki appears to have strengthened after this, and in December 2007 CP announced Awlaki’s release and told readers that any messages of congratulations they had could be passed to him through them—suggesting that CP was at the time in direct contact with Awlaki:
123. Audio in possession of the authors.
125. Ibid.
128. Ibid.
129. Ibid.
130. A full translation of the *bayyan* is in the authors’ possession.