

Radicalization: Myth and Reality

MYTH

Poverty is the primary breeding ground for terrorists.

REALITY

Many terrorists come from middle-class backgrounds and have university-level educations, particularly in the technical sciences and engineering. No statistical relationship exists between poverty and becoming a terrorist.

MYTH

US foreign policy is the primary cause of radicalization.

REALITY

The grievances that fuel radicalization are diverse and vary across locations and groups. Radicalization frequently is driven by personal concerns at the local level in addition to frustration with international events.

MYTH

There are visible “signs” of radicalization.

REALITY

Changes in appearance during different stages of radicalization often are the same changes seen in individuals who are not being radicalized, making it difficult to identify visible markers.

MYTH

The Internet is the main source of radicalization.

REALITY

There is little evidence to support the contention that the Internet plays the dominant role in the process of radicalization. While extremists can use Web sites to convey and reinforce their messages, self-radicalization and self-recruitment via the Internet with little or no relation to the outside world rarely happens.



▲ Under the name Omar Mahmoud Othman, Abu Qatada is under worldwide embargo by UN Security Council Committee 1267 for his affiliation with al-Qa‘ida. He is wanted on terrorism charges in the United States, Algeria, Belgium, Spain, France, Germany, Italy, and his native Jordan. Currently in custody in Great Britain, Abu Qatada—whom a former Home Secretary once called “the most significant extremist preacher in the United Kingdom”—has been indicted for being the spiritual advisor to convicted al-Qa‘ida terrorists Zacarias Moussaoui and Richard Reid.



▲ Abu Hamza al-Masri, former imam of Finsbury Park Mosque in north London, was convicted in February 2006 on eleven charges including solicitation to murder and “stirring up racial hatred.”