

Intelligence Collection and Analysis

The first is intelligence collection and analysis. Intelligence is the principal source of information on terrorists. The police and intelligence agencies have a variety of ways of identifying terrorists, including signal intelligence (such as monitoring cell-phone calls) and human intelligence (such as using informants to penetrate cells). Human intelligence can provide some of the most useful actionable intelligence. But it requires painstaking work in recruiting informants who are already in terrorist organizations or placing informants not yet in them.

This means monitoring key individuals within al Qaeda central, as well as key hubs in such places as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Algeria, and the United Kingdom. The head of the UK security service, MI-5, noted in late 2007 that his organization identified at least 2,000 individuals "who we believed posed a direct threat to national security and public safety, because of their support for terrorism." Most were al Qaeda inspired or assisted.¹² The greatest priority should be extensive penetration of terrorist networks. Recruitment of agents in place is sometimes difficult because of the strong emotional bonds among members of terrorist networks, making them reluctant to betray their friends and their faith. Local police and intelligence services are often better placed to recruit informants in al Qaeda cells. In 2008, MI-5 estimated that it took roughly 18 months on average for an individual to become radicalized enough to conduct an attack. That period is fundamental for police and intelligence services to identify suspects, collect information, and arrest them.¹³

The best avenue for penetration often lies in recruiting from the pool of those who went through training but decided not to join the jihad or others who might associate with jihadists in such places as mosques. In the 2007 plot to target John F. Kennedy International Airport, for example, New York law-enforcement officials recruited an informant who attended the same Brooklyn mosque as Russell Defrei-

¹² Jonathan Evans, "Address to the Society of Editors by the Director General of the Security Service, Jonathan Evans," Society of Editors' "A Matter of Trust" conference, Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Manchester, UK, November 5, 2007.

¹³ Interview with UK intelligence official by Seth G. Jones, January 23, 2008.