PUTTING THE "L" INTO INTELLIGENCE-LED POLICING: HOW POLICE LEADERS CAN LEVERAGE INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITY[1]

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It has been just over a year since the New York Police Department released its analytical report *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*. The report analyzed ten discrete terrorist cells that planned, and in some cases conducted, attacks. By identifying common characteristics within each group, the report concluded that there is a predictable behavioral pattern that a group of "unremarkable" citizens go through on their way to committing acts of terrorism.

The report provides tangible evidence that major city and state police agencies are building their capacity to collect and analyze information. This is a necessary component in establishing an intelligence-led construct. While a lot of resources have gone into building intelligence and information sharing capability at the state and local level, there has been little investment made in educating executive-level leaders to direct and leverage that capability. How should law enforcement leaders manage the activities of intelligence resources, evaluate analytical reports such as NYPD's offering on homegrown radicalization, and take practical actions based on analytical reporting?

NYPD's report provides a vehicle for examining these questions. What follows is a brief summary of the critical findings of the report, some commentary on how a police leader might evaluate those findings, and some suggested practical measures that can be taken in response. While this article discusses radicalization and prevention of terrorism, its main purpose is to provide a concrete example of how police leaders can direct intelligence capacity and leverage analytical products.

The Stages of Radicalization

According to the report, there are four common stages in the radicalization process: pre-radicalizaton, self-identification, indoctrination and jihadization.

The pre-radicalization stage "describes an individual's world . . . just prior to the start of their journey down the path of radicalization." The characteristics of this stage include the environment and the candidates. The environments considered in the report consisted of largely Muslim ethnic enclaves which, by virtue of isolation, are vulnerable to penetration by a "purer, more devout form of Islam." The candidates are most often male Muslims between the ages of 15-30 who come from middle class families.

[1] This is a preprint of an article submitted for publication in the Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence © (Taylor & Francis) in the Summer 2009 edition. The Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence is available online at http://www.informaworld.com. The published article can be found at http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a909488457~db=all~order=page).

"Invariably, these individuals seek other like-minded individuals and often form a loose-knit group cluster, or network." As with many social groups, common characteristics, such as "age, residence, school interests, personality, and ethnicity are critical in determining" group membership.

As the group forms, the self-identification stage "marks the point where the individual begins to explore Salafi Islam, while slowly migrating away from their former identity." The reason for this change "is often a cognitive event, or crisis, which challenges ones certitude in previously held beliefs." Johnny Walker Lindh (a.k.a., the "American Taliban"), for example, was a product of a divorce, and Adam Gadahn (a.k.a., "Azzam the American", whose propaganda videos made in Pakistan threaten violence against the U.S. Homeland) had moved out of his parents' hippie-farm in Southern California to live with his grandparents. He told new friends that his parents were divorcing.

As the process continues, the individual creates an atmosphere in which extreme beliefs take hold. In this indoctrination stage "an individual progressively intensifies his beliefs, wholly adopts [the] ideology and concludes, without question, that the conditions and circumstances exist where action is required to support and further [his] cause." Politicization of this new belief system is a key indicator. In this stage, the individual divides events, real and perceived, in terms of "us vs. them". There is an acceptance of "a religious-political worldview that justifies, legitimizes, encourages, or supports violence against anything *kufr*, or un-Islamic."

In the final stage of jihadization, "members of the cluster accept their individual duty to participate in jihad and self-designate themselves as holy warriors or mujahedeen." Group think plays an important role in this stage, as the group becomes the individual's reality. Common bonding activities include travel abroad, adventure training, viewing jihadist videos, making a suicide video, and attack planning.

Evaluation

The study of the radicalization process is not unique. Much attention has been paid to this in academic and security circles. However, this is the first time that a major city or state law enforcement agency in the U.S. aired its view on the subject publicly. As such, it provides an invaluable point of departure for other state and local law enforcement leaders to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the analysis, its applicability to local and regional jurisdictions, and the imperatives it suggests for organizational and tactical responses.

A critical threshold question for law enforcement leaders is whether this report presents an enforcement problem that falls within the core competency and charter of a law enforcement agency. As illustrated in Figure 1, the only stage in this model in which criminal conduct is clearly exhibited is the jihadization stage. Perhaps some gray area exists in the indoctrination stage where behavior begins to shift from legal/protected to criminal.

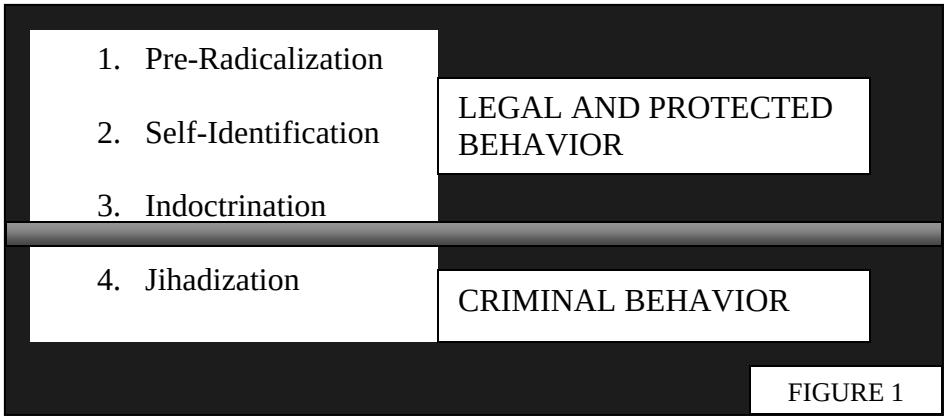

FIGURE 1

Yet, as the report indicates, the final stage can be relatively short-lived. If law enforcement waits for this stage to materialize before it acts, reaction time will be reduced significantly. It would be helpful to have more leeway in identifying and scrutinizing groups in the first three stages, but this carries with it the potential problems of targeting protected behavior and/or proceeding without a clear criminal predicate.

In designing intelligence-oriented responses that focus on the first three stages, it is important for law enforcement leaders to build outside support and to establish appropriate safeguards. At a minimum, political leaders should be fully briefed, should approve of the organizational and tactical measures involved, and should be comfortable with the safeguards adopted to prevent abuses of traditional liberties. Community groups should also be engaged to the extent that operational security permits.

Such steps will help ensure that the actions of law enforcement are widely perceived to be and are in fact legitimate. Transparency, as marked by broad public confidence that the police are doing the right thing legally and morally, is of paramount importance. Taking great care to ensure that intelligence and enforcement operations are narrowly targeted to uncover "terrorist cell[s] determined to go operational" is also critical.

The NYPD report focuses exclusively on intelligence and enforcement activities. Yet there are two important reasons why the legitimacy, real and perceived, of these activities is equally important as the activities themselves. First, a broad number of commentators have argued that there are activists within the U.S. who are attempting to create division, alienation, and a sense of persecution in Muslim-American communities, ultimately leading to the imposition of divine law, as understood by those activists. Enforcement or intelligence activities that are, or are widely perceived to be, illegitimate provide these activists with the working material they need to achieve their divisive purpose. Second, communities are more inclined to cooperate with law enforcement, when law enforcement is perceived to be doing the right thing by those communities. This is a fundamental tenant of community policing, which has endured the test of time.

A second area for law enforcement leaders to evaluate in any analytical report is the basis by which the analyst arrived at his or her conclusions. In this report, the analysts based their conclusions on the careful study of ten cases. Statistically speaking, there can not

be a lot of confidence in such a small sample size. Additionally, the analysts did not consider extremist groups other than jihadists, for example, white supremacists or environmental extremists.

The small data set perhaps leads to some faulty conclusions. For example, the report indicates that there was "little, if any criminal history" involved with the individuals studied. This claim is unsupported by the data presented in the report, and the samples chosen for the study tend to underplay the crime-terror connection when compared with other relevant examples.

According to the report's own data, 3 of the 5 foreign examples cited had criminal connections (Madrid, Amsterdam, and Melbourne/Sydney). While there are no data presented on the 7/7 bombing in London, Shehzad Tanweer had been arrested for disorderly conduct and Hasib Hussain for shoplifting.[2] These individuals had also come across the radar screen of Britain's security services.[3] In the Toronto case, several members, including Fahim Ahmad had smuggled weapons into Canada from the United States.[4] Arguably, all five cases had criminal connections that law enforcement either knew or could have known about.

While all three of the U.S. cases are devoid of criminal connections, the report constrains itself by the sample size and samples chosen. Other case studies that could have been selected such as the Torrance, California case or the Millennium Bomber are rife with criminal connections. One of the two New York cases chosen (the Herald Square Plot) had a criminal connection. In summary, 6 of the 10 cases presented had criminal connections, while important cases left out of the analysis also have criminal connections.

Clearly, more data points are needed to confirm that the report has captured an accurate general pattern of radicalization. Here is a case where police leaders should task their agencies' intelligence and analytical teams with the job to find more information. Additionally, those teams could be tasked to determine whether this same process is evident in domestic terror groups, which often present more pressing problems for local law enforcement in the U.S.

Action

After determining whether an analytical report presents a problem that is a priority and within the agency's authority to act upon, evaluating the basis of the analyst's conclusions, and tasking intelligence/analytical teams with follow up reports, a police executive should then begin determining what action is required.

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[2] Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005. Page 36. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/11_05_06_narrative.pdf

[3] "Profile: Shehzad Tanweer". BBC News. July 6, 2006. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4762313.stm

[4] See, "Ties to Mosque Link 6 Arrested in Canada Raid". New York Times. June 5, 2006 (noting that two suspects "did not appear in court because they have been serving time in Kingston prison on weapons possession charges.") See also, "Canadian Jihadi Network—International Terrorism Monitor—Paper No. 74". South Asia Analysis Group, http://www.saag.org/%5Cpapers19%5Cpaper1841.html.

RAND Corporation's Brian Michael Jenkins, a terrorism expert who advised on the report, identified its four fundamental values: a training reference, a baseline for continued study of radicalization, a tool in the criminal justice system, and a tool for formulating strategies to separate the threat from its potential recruiting base. This list presents a good starting point for building organizational capacity and adjusting tactics.

Perhaps the most important criminal justice tool that can be derived from this report is a template of individual and group behavior that can drive collection and analysis efforts. In evaluating this report, the need to preserve legitimacy and narrowly tailor intelligence and enforcement activities was identified. And while not mentioned in the report, a growing number of jurisdictions are concluding that the resource commitment made to homeland security is out of line with local priorities.[5]

Given the critical importance of maintaining legitimacy, and the need to preserve resources, police can build a template of behaviors associated with extremist violence and use that as a tool to focus intelligence and enforcement activities. Such a template can help law enforcement articulate suspicion and determine when stepped up surveillance and investigation is required. As Jenkins notes, the report "will assist prosecutors and courts in the very difficult task of deciding when the boundary between a bunch of guys sharing violent fantasies and a terrorist cell determined to go operational has been crossed." Presumably, a template based on the report's data and additional data points, perhaps including domestic extremist groups, would guide that effort.

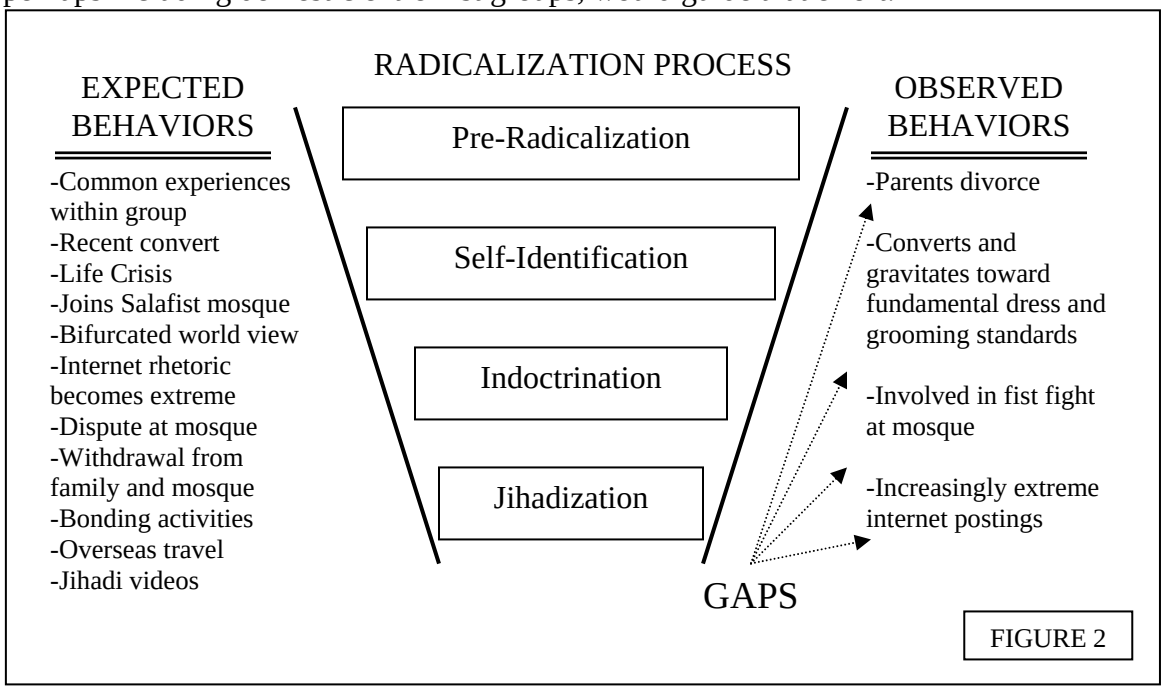

FIGURE 2

As depicted in Figure 2, a template would begin by listing the expected individual and group behaviors that occur along the radicalization trajectory. When behaviors are observed and reported, analysts can develop an incomplete picture. Additional research,

[5] Johnston, David. "A City's Police Force Now Doubts Terror Focus". The New York Times. July 24, 2008.

investigation and surveillance could then be targeted on identifying information to fill the gaps between what behaviors have already been observed and what other behaviors are expected to occur. Leaders can then have an objective basis for deciding what response to take based on where the particular group falls on the radicalization trajectory. Early on in the process, for example, community groups or other stakeholders could be engaged in order to pre-empt problems from occurring. Later in the process, enforcement actions may be more appropriate.

With such theoretical constructs in place, the law enforcement leader's next job is to harness and coordinate the ability of his or her agency to search for and collect on suspect behaviors and other operational indicators. As depicted in Figure 3, state and local law enforcement has put in place many capabilities to do that since the 9/11 attacks. The job of leaders is to continue to learn the behavioral patterns and other signatures associated with terror attacks around the globe by careful study of those attacks. Armed with this knowledge, leaders can prompt the collection capabilities at their disposal to search for these signs.

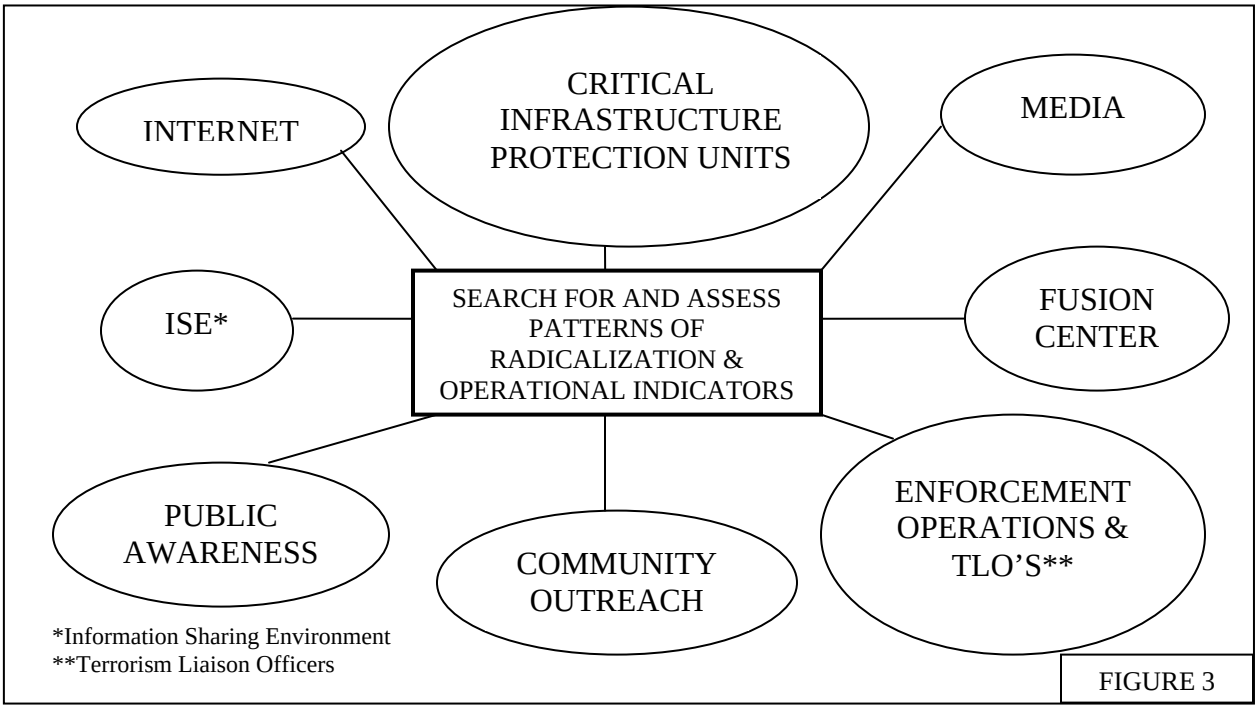

FIGURE 3

To illustrate how this might work, consider how a police leader might react to NYPD's report. One approach is to lean heavily on traditional enforcement mechanisms, such as undercover officers and informants. The leader might deploy these agents to mosques, Muslim communities, or venues where young Muslims congregate. This approach would be executed in secret, which carries a risk: should it be exposed, would it survive scrutiny? Additionally, it could prove to be labor-intensive and, therefore expensive. There are also opportunity costs to consider: undercover officers and informants are generally confined to one task, leaving them unable to work on other priority areas.

Another way is to tap existing capabilities to develop less intrusive means of searching for behavioral signs of radicalization in the environment, and to then to focus enforcement capabilities on specific cases where those behaviors are observed. Following this approach, the police leader might begin by having analysts at the fusion center summarize the NYPD report's findings and brief enforcement teams on behavioral signs. The next step could be guiding the development of a coordinated effort to search for and build the capacity to identify warning signs. Investigators and TLO's might review past cases, for example, while community outreach and public awareness campaigns were being designed. There are many other levers that the leader can pull in order to continuously scan as much information about the environment as possible. It is important to note that each asset employed in this effort will preserve the capacity to focus on other problem areas. The key leader tasks are to provide direction and guidance and to coordinate the effort.

In this case, a TLO from one of the precincts might report a past physical altercation at a local mosque that prompted a call for service. The officer on the scene determined this to be a minor incident and decided that no enforcement action was required. The police leader can take a data point like this and ensure that it is fed back into the system. Cyber units might see if the instigator is posting anything on the web; community policing officers who have built a relationship with mosque and community leaders might find out more about the fight and who was involved—using the template as a guide to provide focus.

Perhaps it will be discovered that the instigator of the fight is a recent convert with a difficult family background. The fight ensued after a series of heated discussions in which the instigator was behaving strangely and was unsatisfied that fellow worshipers were sufficiently adhering to the precepts of the religion. It might also be discovered that this individual has been associating with a select group of like-minded individuals.

As these activities unfold, a constant stream of reporting flows to analysts at the fusion center, who would continue to update the intelligence picture and brief decision makers. An important area for the police leader to focus attention is on the gaps in knowledge—what behaviors are missing from the expected radicalization path and what resources are best suited to search for the missing information. Eventually, a decision point will be reached: is this a "bunch of guys sharing violent fantasies" or a "terrorist cell determined to go operational?" The former case might call for engaging community leaders and family members, while the latter might involve stepped up investigation or the deployment of undercover officers.

This example is not simply a theoretical one.[6] To the contrary, many police leaders are demonstrating the ability to anticipate problems, harness the collection capabilities at their disposal, build understanding, and take action. For example, after Chechen rebels raided a primary school in Central Asia, killing 331 innocents, LAPD officials tapped investigators to determine if any Chechen extremists operated in Los Angeles. As a

[6] The example is based on the radicalization of Adam Gadahn. See Khatchadourian, Raffi. "Azzam the American". The New Yorker. January 22, 2007.

result, the LAPD uncovered and busted a massive car theft ring with possible ties to Chechen extremists.[7] In another case, New Jersey State Police officials, acting on intelligence reports based on multiple information sources, determined that the Nine Tre street gang was the State's most violent. In a carefully planned and executed operation, troopers arrested almost 90 gang members before the gang could react.[8]

As these examples demonstrate, already existing capabilities provide police agencies with an awesome power to identify problems, gather information and build understanding. The charge of police leaders is to learn how to manipulate and harmonize all of these various capabilities in order to improve the quality of decisions and reduce the time it takes to make them—both of which result from an enhanced understanding of the threat.

Conclusion

We live in the Information Age. In business, the military, academia, and many other fields, the ability to pull information from the environment and gain understanding in compressed time periods is critical to success. The law enforcement profession is also beginning to see the value of information and intelligence. This article is an attempt to describe how police leaders can leverage intelligence capacity by discussing one complex analytical report that a local law enforcement agency produced. It should be noted that the processes and techniques described here can be applied against any public safety issue—from traditional crime, to disaster relief, to counter terrorism.

Many resources have been invested in increasing the ability of state and local law enforcement to collect and analyze information. There are over 50 state and regional fusion centers around the country, dozens of information sharing platforms, multiple new varieties of specialty teams (e.g., cyber crime and critical infrastructure protection), chief information officers, and growing legions of analysts working on the "I" of intelligence-led policing.

More attention is needed on the "L". Successful police leaders in the 21st century will have mastered the ability to prompt the various assets available to their agencies in order to pull information from the environment, analyze that information, gain understanding and use that understanding to reduce public safety threats. These leaders will not emerge spontaneously. It is only through a vastly stepped up, national effort to educate police officers throughout their careers that such leaders will arrive on the scene in sufficient numbers.

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[7] Block, Robert. "An L.A. Police Bust Shows New Tactics For Fighting Terror". The Wall Street Journal. December 29, 2006.

[8] Eiserer, Tanya. "Dallas police developing intelligence hub". The Dallas Morning News. January 16, 2007. For other excellent examples of how police agencies collected information on a particular public safety problem, analyzed the data, evaluated/understood the analysis, and acted on that understanding, see Harnett, Patrick J and William Andrews. "How New York is Winning the Drug War". The City Journal. Summer 1999; and Shoofs, Mark. "Novel Police Tactic Puts Drug Market Out of Business". The Wall Street Journal. September 27, 2006.