
Tablighi Jamaat Dossier

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Tablighi Jamaat Dossier

Executive Summary:

With origins in Pakistan, Tablighi Jamaat (TJ) is a nominally apolitical and nonviolent group comprised of traveling Islamic missionaries. It is not a terrorist group, but worthy of study and concern nevertheless. Growing out of the Deobandi school of Islam, TJ stresses traditional Islamic practices linked to worship, dress and behavior as a path to personal improvement. Thus, it easily attracts troubled, impressionable young men and instills them with extreme religious conviction. While the Tablighi Jamaat is nonviolent, the zealotry of its recruits has proven easy for violent organizations to manipulate. Its missionary work, moreover, demands TJ members to travel throughout the world, including between Pakistan and many Western countries (some terrorist have used it as a cover to travel). The group assembles radical recruits and deposits them in places where they can be gathered by terrorist organizations. Some of these recruits have fought in jihadist wars; others have returned to the United States with violent intentions. In spite of the criminal conduct of some of its adherents, Tablighi Jamaat itself remains a legal organization.

Tablighi Jamaat was founded in the 1920s, and started operations in the United States some 50 years later. The movement has more than a million members worldwide, and by some estimates between 15,000 and 50,000 adherents in the United States.¹ The group gained notoriety in 2001 following the news that John Walker Lindh, the “American



Taliban,” first entered Pakistan through the encouragement of a Tablighi Jamaat missionary.² Subsequently, a number of other alleged terrorists have been linked to Tablighi Jamaat. This list includes Omar Padilla (see picture), currently held as an “enemy combatant” for planning to detonate a radiological device in the United States; Richard Reid, who attempted to ignite a shoe bomb on a flight from Paris to Miami in December 2001; the Lackawanna Six,³ a

group of Yemeni-Americans jailed for attending al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan; Lyman Faris, convicted of planning to bomb the Brooklyn Bridge, and a group of seven Muslims in Portland, Oregon accused of attempting to join the Taliban to fight against the United States.³

Threat Assessment

Assessing the danger posed by Tablighi Jamaat in the United States requires specifying distinct dangers arising from the group, and then weighing the likelihood of such behaviors occurring. Possibilities include: (1) Tablighi Jamaat, in an organized fashion, committing terrorist acts. (2) Members of the group, acting individually, committing

¹ See notes, 17, 80, 81 below.

² “A Long Strange Trip to the Taliban,” *Newsweek*, December 17, 2001; Don Lattin and Kevin Fagan, “John Walker’s Curious Quest: Still a Mystery How the Young Marin County Convert to Islam Made the Transition from Spiritual Scholar to Taliban Solider,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 13, 2001.

³ Who is Richard Reid?” *BBC News*, December 28, 2001, www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1731568.stm; Jessica Stern, “The Protean Enemy,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 1, 2003, 5.

terrorist acts. (3) Terrorist groups evolving from Tablighi Jamaat. (4) The group providing a cover, via its traveling requirements, to individuals intending to commit terrorist acts— or terrorists infiltrating the group for their own purposes. (5) The group indirectly contributing to terrorist operations by radicalizing individuals; thus making them more likely to commit terrorist acts or join terrorist groups. (6) The group contributing indirectly to terrorist operations by placing individuals susceptible to extremist ideologies in locations where terrorist can easily recruit them.

These dangers overlap and are difficult to distinguish, but isolating them provides a useful framework for assessing Tablighi Jamaat's relationship to terrorism. In evaluating the chances of the possibilities above occurring, it is tempting to speculate on the intention of Tablighi Jamaat's leadership. What does the group think of its members' tendency to be recruited into more violent organizations or of the tendency for terrorists to use the group as a cover? Does it approve? Oppose? Turn a blind eye? These questions matter legally,⁴ and answering them requires speculation. Although Tablighi leadership denies connections to terrorist activity,⁵ little public information exists on the group's intentions regarding terrorism. Hence, in order to assess the group properly and predict future behaviors accurately, this report will focus primarily on observable facts to assess the Tablighi Jamaat.

Possibility of Members Engaging in Terrorists Attacks in Next Five Years: Low

The first two possibilities mentioned above (and arguably the third) entail direct terrorism by TJ members. Without a major change in Tablighi Jamaat's ideology of non-violence, there is little evidence to suggest that such events would occur (despite some scholars and government officials having asserted otherwise). Individual Tablighi have committed and planned terrorist acts internationally, but no such event has occurred in the United States without Tablighi members first traveling abroad and being recruited by a terrorist group. While accounts are murky, Tablighi may have helped found a number of terrorist groups in North Africa and Pakistan. The relatively low number of TJ members in the U.S., however, makes the emergence of substantial breakaway faction in America unlikely.

Possibility of Members Contributing to Terrorist Recruitment in Next Five Years: High

Most documented cases of terrorism or terrorist plots relating to TJ involve the fourth, fifth or sixth possibilities mentioned above. Many terrorists appear to view Tablighi Jamaat's lack of transparency, peaceful reputation, and international network as an ideal vehicle for moving innocuously around the world. For example, Lyman Faris and members of the "Lackawana Six" pretended to be TJ members in order to facilitate trips to meet with terrorists. Indeed, terrorists have either infiltrated the group directly or simply claimed to

⁴ By knowingly supporting terrorists planning violence against the United States, TJ would violate various U.S. laws. By knowingly providing recruits who fight against foreign states, TJ members would violate the Neutrality Act, which bans fighting against nations with which America is at peace, though that law is rarely enforced. See David Kaplan, Monica Ekman, Jonathan Elliston, Aamir Latif, Michael Reynolds, Kit Roane, "Made in the U.S.A.," *U.S. News and World Report*, June 10, 2002, 2.

⁵ Tablighi members say that their beliefs are "antithetical to everything espoused by Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda." See Sachs, 2.

be members in order to travel. Without an effort by Tablighi Jamaat leadership to stop them, it is probable that terrorist groups will continue to exploit TJ in one of these ways.

Tablighi Jamaat has served as a “gateway to jihadi organizations.”⁶ Richard Reid, John Walker Lindh, Omar Padilla, and others like them were radicalized by the group, sent abroad, then recruited by a militant organizations. This process most likely continues today. On the other hand, while no reliable numbers are available on the number of individuals who have undergone this cycle,⁷ it appears that only a minority of Tablighi recruits have joined terrorist groups. Of these, only a fraction of those contemplated terrorist acts in America, and none succeeded. The defeat of the Taliban and destruction of Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan has also eliminated a major source of terrorist training, but with TJ still sending recruits to Pakistan, where violent groups await to recruit them, they remain likely to create ripe, susceptible young men for terrorist organizations.

⁶ Stern, 5.

⁷ C.I.A., F.B.I., Immigration and State Department officials say that no records exist on foreign travel by U.S. citizens and resident aliens, or of suspicious trips abroad. See Kaplan et al, 2.

Chapter 1: Background

1.1: Origins

The Tablighi Jamaat (“Proselytizing Group”) grew out the Deobandi school of Islamic thought, which emerged under British rule in the Delhi region of northern India. In pre-colonial India, Islamic scholars learned informally, by traveling with their teachers. But in the nineteenth century, inspired by European educational practices, Muslim clerics in India established geographically fixed institutions, known as madrasas, with sequential curriculum, organized classes, and paid faculty. The madrasas were founded by specialists in the “hadith”— the narratives that constitute the Prophet Muhammed’s sayings and practices, which guide all aspects of moral behavior in Islam. These specialists, or “ulama,” issued advisory opinions to guide followers on how to adhere to the hadith. The Deobandi emerged from the madrasas as a movement centered on the ulama.⁸

Deobandis considered themselves reformists, proscribing adherence to a pristine text (the Quran) as a solution to worldly powerlessness. They opposed various contemporary Islamic practices, including excessive rituals at tombs, elaborate lifestyle celebrations and Shia-influenced practices. Following British repression of North Indian Muslims during the Mutiny of 1857, Deobandi leadership adopted an avowedly apolitical stance. But as the Indian nationalist movement rose after World War I, the movement grew political, supporting the Indian National Congress against the British.⁹

Deobandi scholar Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi (1885-1994) formed Tablighi Jamaat in Mewat, India in 1927.¹⁰ Ilyas intended the group to be an antidote to the Hindu conversion efforts that targeted Muslim peasants.¹¹ Tablighi took the dissemination of Islamic teachings out of the madrasa, deemphasizing the importance of clerics and encouraging lay Muslims to undertake proselytizing missions. Ilyas believed this practice would enhance the faith of both the proselytizers and those they approached. Tablighi also clung to the original Deobandi rejection of any explicit political program.¹² University of California historian Barbara Metcalf calls Tablighi Jamaat an “apolitical, quietist movement of internal grassroots missionary renewal,” comparable to Alcoholics Anonymous in “its rejection of progressive era government politics in favor of individual bootstraps.”¹³

After Ilyas died in 1944, his son, Maulana Muhammad Yusuf (1917-1995) took over Tablighi Jamaat and expanded its reach. The movement grew after the partition of India, gaining importance when Pakistani dictator Zia ul-Haq encouraged Deobandis to spread

⁸ Barbara Metcalf, “Traditionalist Islamic Activism,” 3-4.

⁹ Ibid, 4-6.

¹⁰ B. Raman, “Dagestan: Focus on Pakistan’s Tablighi Jamaat,” South Asia Analysis Group, September 15, 1999, writes that Tablighi Jamaat was founded in the 1880’s. Raman argues that Ilyas merely gave Tablighi Jamaat “its present organizational structure.”

¹¹ Dietrich Reetz, “Keeping Busy on the Path of Allah: The Self-Organization (intizam) of Tablighi Jamaat,” Daneila Bredi (ed.) *Islam in Contemporary South Asia* (Rome: Oriente Moderno, 2004) 295-305.

¹² Metcalf, 6-7.

¹³ Ibid, 1, 6.

Islam there.¹⁴ Yusuf and his successor Inamul Hassan began the movement's targeting of non-Muslims, rather than just lapsed believers. In the 1970s, Tablighi Jamaat missions moved into non-Muslim regions. Alex Alexiev asserts that this move "coincides with the establishment of a synergistic relationship between Saudi Wahhabis and South Asian Deobandis," including "large-scale Saudi financing of Tablighi Jamaat."¹⁵

The movement's lack of formal bureaucratic structure makes its growth hard to quantify, but in recent years between a few hundred thousand and two million adherents have congregated annually (see picture) at three-day meetings in Raiwind, Pakistan,



comprising arguably the second largest gathering of Muslims anywhere in the world after the Hajj in Saudi Arabia.¹⁶ Annual gatherings also occur in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Bhopal, Pakistan, Dewsbury, England, and New York.¹⁷

1.2: Ideology

Tablighi Jamaat members are required to read the Quran as well as the Tablighi Nisab, seven essays written by Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya Kandhlawi, a follower of Ilyas. But the movement stresses face-to-face— rather than text-based— learning.¹⁸ Its primary function is traveling missionary work. Members are expected to spend one night a week, one weekend a month, 40 continuous days a year, and 120 days at least once in their life engaged in missions. Tablighi preaches a return to the teachings of Islam's seventh-century founders, including segregation of women and rejection of activities like voting, which they say distracts Muslims from preparing for judgment day. They wear beards, robes, and leather booties in order to replicate the dress of Islam's prophet Muhammad.¹⁹

Metcalf argues that an overriding emphasis on the range of traditional personal practices linked to worship, dress and behavior distinguishes Deobandi-inspired movements, such as the Taliban and Tablighi Jamaat, from other Islamic movements.²⁰ Group members say that they promote individual— not societal— change,²¹ and that religion for them is personal, not political. Anthropologist Oliver Roy asserts that because these "neo-fundamentalist" movements lack a systematic ideology or a "global political agenda,"

¹⁴ Alexiev, 2.

¹⁵ Ibid, 2-3.

¹⁶ The number of Tablighis gathering each year is not clear. *The New York Times*' Susan Sachs claims "hundreds of thousands" attend annual ceremonies. See Sachs, 3. B Raman claims "over a million" gather in Raiwand each year. Barbara Metcalf says "perhaps two million" congregate.

¹⁷ Metcalf, 7.

¹⁸ Barbara Metcalf, "Living Hadith in the Tablihi Jama'at" *The Journal of Asian Studies* (52:3, 1993), 584-608. See also, Alexiev, 2.

¹⁹ Sachs, 3.

²⁰ Metcalf, "Traditionalist Islamic Activism," 2.

²¹ Sachs, 1-2.

they are distinct from “Islamist” movements like Al Qaeda, whose outlook is a reaction to modern Western ideologies such as nationalism, capitalism and Marxism.²²

But how significant is this distinction? Metcalf writes that because Deobandi movements lack political beliefs, “virtually any strategy is accepted that allows the goal of encouraging what are defined as core, sharia-based individual practice[s].”²³ In the Taliban’s case, political expediency involved alliance with Al Qaeda. An apolitical, quietist stance makes the chances of Tablighi Jamaat sponsoring violence somewhat low. TJ missionaries, for example, are taught to shrink from violence even if attacked.²⁴ The movement has even co-existed peacefully alongside liberal regimes.²⁵ But refusal to engage in violence is not the same as opposition to its use; Tablighi recruits have consistently graduated to terrorist groups. Whether Tablighi leadership opposes this pattern is unclear. Regardless, the group’s apolitical stance and emphasis on ritual may act less as a brake on violent intentions of some adherents than as a moral and political vacuum into which Islamist groups like Al Qaeda can instill a violent, radical ideology. Systemic ideologies give adherents a framework from which to assess the validity of claims of other ideologies. By teaching reverence for sharia without a moral framework indicating how or why it should be imposed, Tablighi Jamaat may prepare its recruits to be manipulated.

"You teach people to exclude themselves, that they don't fit in, that the modern world is an aberration, an offense, some form of blasphemy," says U.C.L.A. Islamic law professor Khaled Abou El Fadl. "By preparing people in this fashion, you are preparing them to be in a state of warfare against this world... I don't believe there's a sinister plot where they're in bed with Osama bin Laden [and] are hiding it, but I think that militants exploit the alienated and withdrawn social attitude created by the Tablighi by fishing in the Tablighi pond."²⁶

1.3: Organization

Tablighi Jamaat keeps its activities secret. It shuns media attention and does not issue statements.²⁷ This lack of transparency means that little is known about its structure. According to many accounts, however, it is led by an emir who presides over an advisory council (*Shura*). Since Ilyas died, all Tablighi leaders have been related to him through marriage or blood. The Shura oversees organizations in individual countries,²⁸ and Imams oversee individual mosques.

²² Oliver Roy, “Has Islam a Future in Afghanistan?” in William Maley (ed.) *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban* (New York: NYU Press 1998), 208.

²³ Metcalf, “Traditionalist Islamic Activism,” 2; Graham Fuller, “The Future of Political Islam, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2002, 49, notes that “People of all sorts of faiths can rapidly develop interpretations of their religion that justify practically any political quest.

²⁴ Metcalf, “Traditionalist Islamic Activism,” 7. Tablighi emphasize sukun, the “peace” that they experience performing their work.

²⁵ Ibid, 11.

²⁶ Sachs, 3.

²⁷ Raman, 8.

²⁸ Alexiev, 2.

Tablighi Jamaat operates throughout the world and enjoys strong grassroots support in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Malaysia.²⁹ The group has mosques in at least 10 U.S. states.³⁰ The Al Falah mosque in Corona, Queens (see picture) serves as Tablighi Jamaat's East Coast headquarters and as a meeting place for activists from the group's 11 regional zones and 37 local areas. But Tablighi Jamaat is not tightly organized. As *The New York Times* writes, the group is "less a formal organization than a network of part-time preachers."³¹ Thus, it is best to think of it as movement or large-scale activity, as opposed to a well-structured group.



1.4: Finances

Like its activities, Tablighi Jamaat keeps its finances secret. Leaders insist, however, that the group does not accept money from outside sources and requires its missionaries to cover their own expenses during trips.³² This is probably false. Alexiev claims that Saudi organizations such as the World Muslim League help fund the transport of Tablighi missionaries.³³ In 1978, the World Muslim League financed the building that currently serves as Tablighi Jamaat's European headquarters.³⁴ Tablighis also receive indirect financial benefit by operating from Deobandi and Wahhabi mosques and other Islamic centers,³⁵ and Wahhabi sources may have paid salaries to Tablighi members in Africa.³⁶

²⁹ *Wikipedia*, "Tablighi Jamaat," en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tablighi_Jamaat

³⁰ Lisa Myers, "FBI monitors Islamic Group for Terror Ties," *MSNC.com*, January 18, 2005.

³¹ Sachs, 3.

³² Dr. Jasim Taqui, *Frontier Post* (Peshawar), January 15, 1999, cited in Raman, 8.

³³ Alexiev, 3.

³⁴ *Financial Times*, April 12, 1982, cited in Alexiev, 3.

³⁵ Alexiev, 3.

³⁶ *Associated Press*, February 22, 2004.

Chater 2: Types of Danger

2.1: Direct Terrorism

Will Tablighi Jamaat members commit a terrorist act on behalf of the organization, as Al Qaeda members commit terrorist acts on behalf of their organization? Some consider this a possibility. Alexiev speculates that the group may be “an Islamist fifth column.”³⁷ A Defense Intelligence Agency (D.I.A.) memo written in April 2004 and leaked to NBC News in January 2005 claims that some Tablighi Jamaat members “have the capability to conduct a terrorist attack in the U.S.”³⁸ That, however, is not a revelation. With legal access to explosives and guns, most Americans have the capability to conduct terrorist acts. Yet because they lack any intention of doing so, they are harmless. Do TJ members intend to commit terrorism? Neither the organization nor active Tablighi missionaries have been accused of committing any crime or of supporting terrorism in the United States.³⁹ The D.I.A memo notes no evidence of planning.⁴⁰

2.2: Danger of Terrorist Members

Examples of individual Tablighi committing terrorist acts— either alone or in concert with separate organizations— do exist, however. For example, Yusef Fikri, the former leader of the terrorist group At-Takfi wal-Hirjah, recently sentenced to death by a Moroccan court for his role in a May 2004 Casablanca bombing, was a Tablighi member. A group of Tablighis were expelled from Kazakhstan in 2003 for engaging in extremist propaganda and recruitment.⁴¹ And Indian Tablighi leader Maulana Umarji is a suspect in the February 2002 fire bombing of a train full of Hindu nationalists in Gujarat, India.⁴²

The D.I.A memo cited above asserts that a Tablighi official at Midwestern mosque “has associations with several al-Qaida supporters.” The memo notes that seven Tablighi leaders in the United States are currently under investigation, though it does not state the results of the investigation.⁴³

Tablighi leaders have argued that the group’s refusal to discuss politics means that people with militant views leave quickly. In 2003, Abdul Rahman Khan, a leader of the group's North American leadership council, told *The New York Times*, “Those people who have those intentions don't talk around us. If someone [utters] even one word, we cut him off. So he's going to go somewhere where he can get an audience.”⁴⁴ Imam Zia Hafez Paracha, imam of a Tablighi mosque in Queens, claims anyone who espouses violence is barred from the group. “We stop them,” Paracha told NBC News last year. “We don’t let them come.”⁴⁵

The low number of incidents cited above, in light of the number of Tablighis operating

³⁷ Alexiev, 6.

³⁸ Myers.

³⁹ Sachs, 2.

⁴⁰ Myers.

⁴¹ Alexiev, 4.

⁴² *India Today* (New Delphi), February 24, 2003, cited in Alexiev, 4.

⁴³ Myers.

⁴⁴ Sachs, 3.

⁴⁵ Myers.

internationally, indicate these claims may have credence. Tablighi Jamaat contains terrorists, but the group's apolitical nature probably limits their number. The chances of TJ members engaging in terrorism in the United States, without the radicalization process discussed below, is low.

2.3 The Danger of Militant Offshoots

Another danger posed by Tablighi Jamaat is the chance that group members could break off to form violent organizations. One Pakistani scholar claims that Tablighi Jamaat's founder, Maulana Ilyas, "was of the view that the Tablighi movement and politically-oriented Islamic groups, although operating in two different spheres, were complementing each others' work."⁴⁶ Alexiev asserts that "Tablighi Jamaat has long been directly involved in the sponsorship of terrorist groups."⁴⁷ It is also possible that groups intending violence break off from Tablighi Jamaat because of its nonviolent stance. Insufficient information exists to determine which assertion is more valid. Either way, "although it may have been founded to create better individuals," as Stern writes, "TJ has produced offshoots that have evolved into more militant outfits."⁴⁸

In Pakistan during the 1990s, members of a Tablighi Jamaat faction headquartered in Taxila, Pakistan held positions in the government of Prime Minister Naqaz Sharif, whose father was a Tablighi member.⁴⁹ Most Tablighi advocate jihad ("jihad bin nafs,") through conscience, a personal form of jihad. But the Taxila faction advocated jihad through the sword ("jihad bin saif").⁵⁰ In 1995, members of that group were accused of plotting a coup against the relatively secular Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.⁵¹ Whether members of the Taxila group represent a subsection or a breakaway faction of Tablighi Jamaat is disputable. But in either case, they demonstrate the potential of TJ members to embrace overtly political or violent means.

The coup plot against Bhutto was supported by members of Harakat ul-Mujahideen (HUM), a Pakistani militant organization. Pakistani news sources claim that almost all HUM's founding members were former Tablighi members.⁵² Founded via Tablighi in 1980, HUM claimed responsibility for the murder of a busload of French engineers in Karachi in May 2002 and for the hijacking of an Air India jet in December 1998, winning the release of a militant later convicted of helping murder *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl. HUM members have been quoted professing a close association with Tablighi Jamaat, though Tablighi do not reciprocate the claim.⁵³ The militant Pakistani

⁴⁶ Mumtaz Ahmed, "Frontier Post, January 27, 1999, cited in Raman, 9.

⁴⁷ Alexiev, 3.

⁴⁸ Stern, 5.

⁴⁹ B. Raman, "Nawaz in a Whirlpool," South Asia Analysis Group, October 10, 1999.

⁵⁰ "Jihad" can be translated to mean "holy war" or "struggle." See Metcalf, "Traditionalist Islamic Activism," 8.

⁵¹ "The Herald" (Karachi), November 1995, cited by Raman, 10.

⁵² Kamran Khan, *News*, February 13, 1995, cited in B. Raman, "Dagestan: Focus on Pakistan's Tablighi Jamaat.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 7.

group Harakat ul-Jihad-I Islami, which is closely related to HUM and active in the disputed Indian provinces of Jammu and Kashmir, is an alleged Tablighi offshoot.⁵⁴

Tablighi members may have also had a hand in creating the Islamic Salvation Front, a terrorist group in Algeria. In Morocco, authorities have arrested 60 members of the Tablighi offshoot *Dawa wa Tabligh* in connection with a May 2003 attack on a Casablanca synagogue.⁵⁵ Members of that group are also under investigation in the Netherlands for the murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh in November 2004.⁵⁶

The relationship between TJ and these groups is unclear. If the groups are composed of former Tablighi members, did they break off and sever ties, or are the relations ongoing? The latter would indicate that TJ actively sponsors these groups. That danger of continuing organizational relationships cannot be discounted (see discussion below regarding the appearance of TJ members in HUM camps.). At minimum, there is a chance that a break-off Tablighi faction could embrace militarism, and thus quite conceivable that such a faction could emerge in the United States. The break-off groups mentioned above, however, operate in North Africa and Pakistan, where the large number of Tablighi adherents makes divisions within the group more likely.

2.4 Danger of Use a Cover for Terrorists: Infiltration

Refusal to discuss politics may help purge Tablighi Jamaat of individuals interested in openly advocating terrorism, but it does nothing to prevent those interesting in infiltrating the group for terrorist-related purposes from joining. "There may be groups that do not actually profess its basic ideology and profound religiosity and yet use the cover of the Tablighi Jamaat in order to evade scrutiny of the security forces, knowing full well that the Jamaat would not take a public stance against any defectors," the Canadian Intelligence Service said in a recent analysis.⁵⁷

Moroccan officials have stated that the terrorist group, Al-Salafiyah al-Jihadiyah, urged its members to join Islamic organizations such as Tablighi Jamaat to hide their identities and influence the group's policies. In November 2004, a Pakistani jihadi website stated that Tablighi activities could be used for jihadist activities. In 2001, the Philippine government accused Tablighi Jamaat of transporting Pakistani volunteers who wanted to join the island's native Islamist terrorists.⁵⁸

TJ leaders say that those who join their missions with violent intentions defy the group's beliefs, but acknowledge doing little to filter out such individuals. "We don't prevent

⁵⁴ Raman, 8. See also, Dan Rothem, "In the Spotlight, Harakat ul-Mujahideen (HUM), July 8, 2002. Center for Defense Information, www.cdi.org.

⁵⁵ *Financial Times*, August 6, 2003

⁵⁶ Craig Smith, "Dutch Look for Al Qaeda Link after Killing of French Filmmaker," *The New York Times*, November 8, 2004.

⁵⁷ Sachs, 4.

⁵⁸ Alexiev, 4. He cites *The Manila Times*, October 12, 2001, *Mufti Khubaib Sahib*, "Advantageous Structure for Jihad Organizations," *2600 News*, November 16, 2004, and *Asharq al-Awsat (London)* respectively, for the points in this paragraph.

anyone from coming, [and] obviously we don't know the nature of the individual who is coming and we don't check," Khan told the *Times*. "There's no way we can."⁵⁹

2.5 Danger of Use as a Cover for Terrorists: False Claims

Terrorists targeting the United States have also used Tablighi Jamaat as a cover. Lyman Faris (see picture), an Ohio truck driver who eventually pled guilty to plotting to destroy the Brooklyn Bridge, claimed to be a Tablighi member in 2001 in order to obtain airline tickets from Pakistan to Yemen.⁶⁰



The “Lackawanna Six,” a group of Muslim men raised in a Yemeni community outside Buffalo, New York, also demonstrate this danger. In early 2001, the men began studying Islam with Kamal Derwish, who the F.B.I. says was an Al Qaeda member. Derwish reminded the men of their obligation to defend Muslims persecuted abroad. He eventually convinced them to travel to militant training camps in Afghanistan via Pakistan. According to the group, Derwish suggested they claim they were going to study with Tablighi Jamaat. The men probably did not interact with TJ at all; they merely claimed to be members. From Pakistan they went directly to Afghan camps for a six-week military training course. There they met Osama Bin Laden, who asked one man about his attitude toward “martyr operations.” The group left the camp to return to Lackawanna, NY. Through a tip, the F.B.I. put them under surveillance. Fearing the group comprised a “sleeper cell,” agents arrested them in late 2002 for their activities in Afghanistan. The men denied violent intentions and do not appear to have engaged in illegal or even unusual activities in the United States.⁶¹ Their story, however, shows how Al Qaeda may use TJ.

Tablighi Jamaat does little to prevent this from occurring. The group’s combination of secrecy and loose organization makes it exploitable. Without records, even the group’s leaders may not be able to chart membership. The chance of terrorists using Tablighi Jamaat as a cover to travel without raising suspicion remains high.

2.6 Danger of Radicalization:

Tablighi Jamaat attracts confused, impressionable young men in search of an identity. It provides that identity in the form of devout Islam and then sends many of these radicalized young Muslims to geographic locations where they are likely to encounter terrorists. That process, more than anything else, is what makes Tablighi Jamaat dangerous.

Bands of Tablighi missionaries will recruit mostly young men at mosques, Islamic centers and college campuses and then invite them to join the group for a few days or

⁵⁹ Sachs, 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 6.

⁶¹ Matthew Purdy and Lowell Bergman, “Unclear Danger: Inside the Lackawanna Terror Case,” *The New York Times*, October 12, 2003, 1-3.

weeks on the road.⁶² In the United States, they recruit aggressively among immigrant communities, particularly in Pakistani neighborhoods.⁶³

Oliver Roy writes that in the West, neo-fundamentalist movements like Tablighi Jamaat spread primarily among disoriented Muslim youths, especially the children and grandchildren of Muslims immigrants. Neofundamentalism, he argues, fuels radicalism and sometimes generates support for violent jihadist causes like those offered by al Qaeda.⁶⁴ As a self-help organization, Tablighi Jamaat seeks troubled individuals. Available evidence indicates that its recruits, particularly those eventually attracted to violent organizations, are not self-confident individuals with clear intentions of becoming terrorists, but confused searchers drawn to the discipline and sense of purpose and belonging the group provides.⁶⁵ They are dangerous because they are easily influenced.

Abdul Haqq Baker, the chairman of Brixton Mosque that Richard Reid attended before traveling to Pakistan, told the BBC that extremists worked on "weak characters" at the mosque and that Reid was "very, very impressionable."⁶⁶ A 19-year-old Tablighi recruit interviewed by *The New York Times* in Queens said that the group had rescued him from drugs and converted him to Islam just weeks before. Asked if he would fight in Chechnya, Kashmir or the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, he responded, "Man, I know I'd kill anybody who killed another Muslim."⁶⁷

2.7 Danger of Recruitment to Terrorist Organizations:

After recruits have completed a few local proselytizing missions, Tablighi officials invite the most committed recruits to the Tablighi center in Raiwind, Pakistan for four months. There, the students are often approached by terrorist organizations who invite them to undertake military training. "A Pakistani TJ member," Stern reports, "told me that jihadi groups openly recruit at the organization's central headquarters in Raiwind, Pakistan, including at the mosque."⁶⁸

A senior law enforcement official calls Tablighi Jamaat "a natural [entry], a way of gathering people together with a common interest in Islam," adding, "Then extremists use that as an assessment tool to evaluate individuals with particular zealotry and interest in going beyond what's offered."⁶⁹ Around eighty percent of Islamist extremists in France have passed through Tablighi Jamaat. French intelligence officials call TJ "the antechamber of fundamentalism."⁷⁰

⁶² Sachs, 1.

⁶³ Raman, Dagestan, 12.

⁶⁴ Oliver Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2004).

⁶⁵ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 2004) writes that alienation, not poverty or religious extremism, is the primary motivating factor for individuals who join militant organizations.

⁶⁶ "Who is Richard Reid?"

⁶⁷ Sachs, 7.

⁶⁸ Stern, 5.

⁶⁹ Sachs, 2.

⁷⁰ *Le Monde* (Paris), January 25, 2002, Alexiev, 3.

Tablighi Jamaat does not just aid terrorists by preparing recruits ideologically. Terrorists and members of terrorist organizations cannot move at will in Western countries, particularly since September 11, 2001. They are, to a degree, stuck in place. By physically assembling groups of radicalized Muslim men and depositing them in Pakistan, Tablighi Jamaat's performs a valuable logistical service for militant groups, facilitating these groups' recruiting process. "If Al Qaeda needed a fresh set of bodies in order to pull off an operation, one of the places they would go for that fresh set of bodies would be Tablighi Jamaat," a former FBI agent who has investigated TJ members told NBC News.⁷¹

The majority of Tablighi participants in Pakistan belong to frontier provinces bordering Afghanistan.⁷² Prior to the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, the Tablighi Jamaat were particularly well-positioned to provide recruits for them. John Walker Lindh (see picture), for example, was recruited by a Pakistani Tablighi in California in 1999. TJ members first took Lindh to Nevada on a proselytizing mission and later encouraged him to attend a madrasa outside Bannu, Pakistan for a month. It is still unclear how Lindh made his way from Bannu into Afghanistan and joined Taliban fighters.⁷³ Jeffrey Leon Battle, one of six men and one woman from Portland, Oregon accused of plotting to fight with the Taliban and Al Qaeda against American forces, attempted to find TJ members in Bangladesh willing to help him get military training, according to federal prosecutors.⁷⁴ The path to terrorist training camps in Afghanistan is now closed to TJ recruits, but terrorist groups in Pakistan most likely still prey on them.



Richard Reid and several British citizens held by U.S. forces in Guantanamo Bay are believed to have made their way from Tablighi Jamaat to HUM.⁷⁵ Thousands of Tablighi recruits may have trained in HUM camps.⁷⁶ Some writers say the group sponsored military training in Pakistan and Algeria for thousands of its recruits in the 1980s.⁷⁷ In 1999,

Uzbek authorities accused TJ of sending 400 of its citizens to terrorist training camps.⁷⁸

Whether Tablighi leaders intend to provide recruits to terrorist organizations or are merely indifferent to the possibility is not clear. But the available evidence indicates that Tablighi Jamaat remains likely to contribute recruits to violent organizations.

⁷¹ Myers.

⁷² Metcalf, "Traditionalist Islamic Activism," 11.

⁷³ "A Long Strange Trip to the Taliban."

⁷⁴ Sachs, 2.

⁷⁵ Kaplan et al, 3.

⁷⁶ Alexiev, 3.

⁷⁷ Surya Gangadharan, "Exploring Jihad: The Case of Algeria," *Strategic Affairs* (New Delhi) February 1, 2001.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Chapter 3: US Operations

Although Tablighi Jamaat does not publicize its numbers, NBC News claims that the group has “as many as 50,000 U.S. members.”⁷⁹ Other estimates put that number at 15,000.⁸⁰ Only about 200 Tablighi attended an annual gathering of the group’s American and Canadian missionaries in 2004,⁸¹ however— indicating the group’s numbers may be even lower.

Whatever its size, TJ’s presence in the United States causes concern among anti-terror officials. According to Michael Heimbach, the deputy chief of the F.B.I.’s international terrorism section, “We have a significant presence of Tablighi Jamaat in the United States, and we have found that Al Qaeda used them for recruiting, now and in the past.”⁸²

The D.I.A. memo obtained by NBC News says that the agency believes extremists have infiltrated Tablighi Jamaat in the United States and are using the group “as [a] cover... to network with other extremists in the U.S.” The same document says that one Tablighi official in the United States may be recruiting “converts for nefarious purposes.”⁸³

Tablighi missionaries in the United States target American Muslims of South Asian origin (particularly Pakistanis) traveling to Sunni mosques and religious centers around the country.⁸⁴ The group is also increasing its efforts to recruit African-American Muslims.⁸⁵ Black Muslims make up more than 30 percent of the American Muslim community and 85 percent of American Muslim converts, due largely to a successful proselytizing drive in U.S. prisons.⁸⁶

Tablighi Jamaat may also use groups of local missionaries for recruiting. The Islamic Circle of North American (I.C.N.A.) does not acknowledge links to Tablighi Jamaat, but is a Deobandi-based organization comprised predominately of South Asians that is committed to missionary work. I.C.N.A. praises Tablighi founder Ilyas and holds annual in South Asia, patterned after Tablighi Jamaat meetings.⁸⁷ At a speech at I.C.N.A.’s 1995 convention, Dr. Israr Ahmed, who identifies himself as a Tablighi Jamaat member, is reported to have told listeners to prepare for the coming conflict between “the Muslim world and non-Muslim world, which has been captured by Jews.”⁸⁸ Ahmed heads Tanzeem-e Islami, an organization that blames Israel for the 9/11 attacks.⁸⁹ Tablighi

⁷⁹ Myers.

⁸⁰ Mohammad-Arif, “Ilyas et Mawdudi au Pays des Yankees: La Tablighi Jamaat et la Jamaat Islami aux Etats-Unis,” *Archive des Sciences Sociales des Religions*, January-March, 2002, cited in Alexiev, 6.

⁸¹ Sachs, 2.

⁸² *Ibid*, 1.

⁸³ Myers.

⁸⁴ Kaplan et al., 3; Raman, 13.

⁸⁵ Stern, 5.

⁸⁶ Alexiev, 6.

⁸⁷ “About ICNA,” Islamic Circle of North America, December 22, 2004, cited in Alexiev, 7.

⁸⁸ Raman, 12.

⁸⁹ Alexiev, 5.

Jamaat has also been accused of recruiting in the United States through Jamaat-ul-Fuqra, a violent, isolationist organization led by Pakistani Sheikh Mubarak Ali Gilani.⁹⁰

Tablighi Jamaat is part of a larger Islamic recruiting effort in the United States that has resulted in a substantial number of Americans going abroad to pursue jihadist causes. Bob Blitzer, a former FBI terrorism chief, estimates that between 1,000 and 2,000 jihadists left America during the 1990s. Pakistani intelligence sources claim that 400 American recruits received training in Pakistani or Afghan terrorist camps between 1989 and 2002.⁹¹ In 1995, HUM, which has since declined in size, claimed that 16 African-American Muslims were among several hundred foreign Muslims in its training camps.⁹² These claims are unreliable, and recruits made their way to Pakistan a variety of ways. Still, many may have been affiliated with Tablighi Jamaat.

No evidence indicates that Tablighi Jamaat members are plotting an attack or actively recruiting for terrorist organizations in the United States. But the group represents a danger in the United States for two reasons. First, as in the case of the Lackawana Six, it may be used by militants as a cover story to facilitate international travel to meet with terrorist groups. Second, Tablighi Jamaat may continue to radicalize young Muslims and then transport them to locations where they are recruited by terrorist groups. Most of these recruits remain abroad. Some, however, may attack American allies or U.S. troops and interests overseas. Others may return to the United States hoping conduct terrorist operations.

A few factors mitigate the danger of this process. Tablighi Jamaat's tendency to be used as a cover is dangerous, but the terrorist groups— not Tablighi Jamaat— probably deserve the brunt of the blame. In the case of TJ providing radicalized recruits, the small number of Tablighi identified in militant groups in comparison to the total number of Tablighi recruits should be noted. Only some Tablighis go to Pakistan. A minority of those are recruited by military organizations. Most of those recruits operate in Pakistan, Kashmir or even Chechnya, though some have fought U.S. troops. Only a few have returned to the United States.

Those that did return acted with notable incompetence. This is undoubtedly due to the nature of Tablighi recruits and of those most likely to join more militant organizations. Tablighi Jamaat and militant organization's are best at recruiting easily influenced individuals—dupes who were, as George Bush described Lindh, "misled."⁹³ Such people make ineffective terrorists. They were manipulated and sent back to America in the hope that they would execute violent, albeit vaguely formulated, plans. None did. These former Tablighis are certainly dangerous, but they are not 9/11-type bombers.

⁹⁰ Raman, 12.

⁹¹ Kaplan et al, "Made in the U.S.A.," 3.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ "A Long Strange Trip to the Taliban."

Conclusion

The process by which Tablighi Jamaat members become radicalized, travel abroad, join terrorist organizations, and (in some cases) return to the United States is well-established. The thousands of Tablighi Jamaat missionaries in the United States can be cited as evidence of the group's danger.⁹⁴ On the other hand, only a fraction of Tablighi recruits appear to have followed this process far enough to endanger Americans. Most simply become devout Muslims and lead peaceful lives.

Tablighi Jamaat may be “a powerful proselytizing movement that preaches extremism and disdain for religious tolerance, democracy and the separation of church and state,”⁹⁵ but in the United States that this conduct is legal. While the group has been investigated in the U.S., no active members have been charged with crimes. Law enforcement officials, of course, must guard against worst case scenarios and remain vigilant for those Tablighi Jamaat recruits who do threaten the United States. But doing so requires neither exaggerating nor underplaying the threat posed by the group. Tablighi Jamaat is neither harmless nor malign.

⁹⁴ Alexiev, 6, writes that “The estimated 15,000 Tablighi missionaries reportedly active in the United States present a serious national security problem.”

⁹⁵ Ibid.