

Testimony by

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Hearing on Violent Extremism: How Are People Moved from Constitutionally-Protected Thought  
to Acts of Terrorism?

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Chairwoman Harman, Ranking Member McCaul, and distinguished subcommittee members, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today to discuss: 1) how people are moved from constitutionally-protected thought to acts of terrorism; 2) what steps could help to prevent this movement. I will do so by focusing on the recent violent radicalization of U.S. Somalis in Minnesota, one of a recent number of worrisome instances of “homegrown terrorism”.

I am a psychiatrist and researcher with more than 15 years' experience conducting a NIH-funded program of investigating, intervening, and collaborating with multiple refugee and immigrant communities. I lead the Working Group on Somali Youth and Psychosocial Counterterrorism, an interdisciplinary group comprised of psychiatry, psychology, nursing, and public health professionals. When we look at present efforts to understand and prevent violent radicalization, we see a lack of adequate conceptualization of family and community processes impeding progress in the development of effective prevention strategies.

In my testimony I will describe what is known about those who mobilized and show that there is a set of contextual risks for violent radicalization deserving of our attention. I propose strategies derived from public health interventions for managing the risks of violent radicalization that focus on ways to enhance community and family protective resources for those at risk.

### **Recruitment in Minnesota**

On October 29, 2008, 27-year-old Shirwa Ahmed of Minneapolis detonated one of six coordinated car bombs attacking the presidential palace, the Ethiopian consulate, and the UNDP in Hargeisa-Bosaso, Somalia in a coordinated attack organized by the Al Shabaab extremist organization (Thomas and Ryan, 2008). This attack killed at least 30 people, including U.N. aid workers. The U.S. government allowed his body to return to Minneapolis where he was buried.

Between late 2007 and Autumn 2008 an estimated 20 or more Somali refugee adolescent boys and young men living in the Minneapolis area secretly left their homes and flew to Somalia to join militant extremist training camps run by the Al Shabaab extremist organization. These men crossed a line into violent radicalization through involvement with Al Shabaab, a designated foreign terrorist organization with known ties to Al Qaeda. Specifically, several men recruited others in Minneapolis and provided financial support to those who traveled to Somalia to fight on behalf of Al Shabaab; several attended terrorist training camps operated by Al Shabaab and then fought on behalf of Al Shabaab in Somalia.

Drawing a distinction between radicalization and violent radicalization is important. For the Somalis who mobilized, the issue is not only or necessarily one of radicalization, defined as commitment to extremist political or religious ideology. Terrorist researchers argue that our central concern should be on preventing violent radicalization and not radicalization per se. It's not what people say or think, but whether they commit violent acts that counts.

Because this investigation is ongoing, youth are still at large, and some families are not trustful enough to talk to outsiders, at present not all facts are public or even known. What is publically known regarding the Minnesota Somalis is that thus far seven have been killed, four are in custody, three of whom have pled guilty, and seven are at large, believed to be in Somalia.

This movement towards violent radicalization is not limited to Minnesota Somalis. A 24-year-old Somali man who lived for 20 years in Copenhagen was identified as the man who carried out the December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009 suicide bombing that killed 23 people in Mogadishu at a medical school graduation ceremony (Hourelid, 2009). In September 2009, Omar Mohamed, an 18-year-old

Somali American from Seattle, detonated a suicide bomb in Somalia against peace-keepers that killed 25 African Union peacekeepers. In 2005 in London, two child dependents of asylum seekers from Somalia, Yasin Omar and Ramzi Mohammed, became failed bombers. In October 2007 an unnamed 21-year-old Somali business student from Ealing, U.K., joined Al Shabaab and made a suicide attack in Baidoa.

Table 1 summarizes what we know about those who mobilized from Minnesota. I will draw upon this information in light of existing knowledge and theory regarding violent radicalization to address the following questions:

- 1. Are there any identifiable risk factors for violent radicalization?**
- 2. What is the process of movement to violent radicalization?**
- 3. How should we approach those who joined Al Shabaab and either have returned or may possibly return at a later date?**
- 4. Can violent radicalization reoccur with more U.S. Somali youth?**
- 5. What steps could help to prevent violent radicalization in U.S. diaspora communities?**

**1. Are there any identifiable risk factors for radicalization and recruitment?** Empirical research on terrorists does not support looking solely at individual-level risk factors (Horgan, 2009). Nor does it support the claim that there is a particular profile of terrorists that clearly distinguishes them from the general population, other than their involvement in violent radicalization. It supports looking at group or organizational factors, but also not exclusively. Though there is some disagreement in the field regarding whether to lean more towards individual or towards group and organizational factors, a consensus position is that it is more accurate and productive to focus on the person in context. Stated otherwise, it is important to pay attention both to push factors (social, economic, and cultural conditions impacting upon a whole community), pull factors (leading a relative few to engage in violent radicalization), and counter-pull factors (efforts working against the impact of pull factors).

All those that engaged in violent radicalization were born in Somalia, raised in refugee camps, and were resettled in the U.S. as refugees during childhood or adolescence. They are neither first nor truly second generation, but belong more to what is referred to as “Generation 1.5” (Alsaybar, 1999). They were raised in large families by single mothers in ghettoized communities, and attended public schools. The recruits experienced the stresses common to most refugee adolescents due to traumatic histories and community violence, as well as from financial, health, family, peer, community, cultural, and school stressors (Ellis et al, 2008).

They all likely shared an exposure to community-level challenges including poverty and community fragmentation. Many Somalis in Minnesota live in low-income housing in impoverished communities, especially the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, also known as “Little Mogadishu”, which is east of downtown Minneapolis. The center of the Somali community in Cedar-Riverside is a large urban renewal high-rise project named the Riverside Plaza, also known as the “Towers”, where more than 3,000 Somalis live. Though originally conceived as a mixed-income community, it is highly impoverished, geographically isolated from the rest of the city, and crime-ridden, with drugs, gangs, and drive-by shootings. For example, in Autumn 2008, Ahmednur Alia, a 20-year-old college student who aspired to be the president of Somalia, was murdered by another Somali youth while volunteering at a community center (Temple-Raston, 2009). Such events have been highly demoralizing to the Somali community and especially youth, including some of those who radicalized. For one of the recruits, Mohamoud Hassan, this murder may have contributed to a greater susceptibility to radicalization and recruitment. He told a friend, “I used to think that death only happens to old people. But he was young — my age. I guess I could die tomorrow.”(Elliot, 2009)

Many but not all the men who were mobilized to violent radicalization lived in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, and five lived in the Towers at some point. They attended four different high schools and three different colleges and did not all attend the same mosque. Within the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood there are six mosques and a plethora of Somali-run malls, small businesses, and restaurants. The community is known for its fragmentation along clan and sub-clan lines. There are well over 100 non-profit Somali Mutual Assistance Associations seeking funds and projects. A few are thriving, but most exist in name only. Ubah Shirwa, publisher of Haboon, the Somali magazine in Minneapolis, stated, "The divisions that existed in Somalia exist here, and they are focused on the politics back home" (Banarjee, 2009). The existence of so many divisions within the community impedes the delivery of community-level support as well as community collaboration with social services, health services, and law enforcement.

Research on U.S. Muslim immigrant communities finds that they are predominantly middle class (only 2% reported living in poverty) and not at significant risk for radicalization, unlike European Muslims whom, it has been argued, experience a "failed integration" (PEW Research Center, 2007; Ruffer, 2008). The experience of Minnesota Somalis, 60% of whom live in poverty, more closely resembles that of Muslim immigrants in the U.K., Spain, and France where 20% or more live in poverty (PEW Research Center, 2007). When surveyed in 2007, 15% of U.S. Muslims ages 18 to 24 believed suicide bombings could be justified (PEW Research Center, 2007, p. 54). Somalis were the first U.S. Muslim youth to join an Al Qaeda affiliated extremist organization and act on these attitudes. In part for these reasons, Ralph S. Boelter, the special agent in charge of the FBI's Minneapolis office, stated, "This case is unlike anything we have encountered" (Elliot, 2009).

Still, only a very small number of Somali youth and young adults are known to have become involved in terrorism (20) compared to the overall Somali population in Minnesota (estimated at 84,000). Think about that from the perspective of Somali parents. Parents have far more reason to be concerned about the risks of school drop-out, drug use, gang involvement, or even autism, which have much higher prevalence in their community.

Somalis express serious concerns regarding the negative image of their community that has been spread due to media attention focusing on the radicalized boys and men. From a community perspective, there are many signs of strength in this community, including: Somalis working in all sectors of society (Darboe, 2003), increasing numbers becoming college educated (especially girls), establishment of businesses, establishment of mosques, several Somali community newspapers, magazines, and websites.

As indicated in Table 1, the mobilization to violent radicalization occurred in two waves. The first wave took place in late 2007 and those who mobilized were ages 24 to 30 (mean 25.8). The second wave took place in Autumn 2008 and those who mobilized were younger, between ages 17 and 27 (mean 19.7). All the Somali youth and young adults who engaged were male. Here, it is relevant to mention the Somalia warrior tradition (Federal Research Division, 2004). This culturally-inscribed coping mechanism guided some boys and young men to take pride in school or sports, but could also have lead others towards gang activity or to affiliation with militant extremists.

All the recruits shared in exposure to certain family-level characteristics typical of refugee families. These included the experiences of war exposure and forced migration prior to coming to the U.S. The U.S. Somali refugees' experiences are like those of other groups that have fled

war in their countries and became refugees. Somali refugees were exposed to war-related traumas and losses, escaped, and then lived in refugee camps (predominately in Kenya) for years, where youth attended either no school or had some inadequate schooling, and were exposed to radical ideologies (Halcon et al., 2004). As children, the youth who mobilized to violent radicalization were either not directly exposed to war violence in Somalia or were too young to remember it, though traumatic exposure and memories were highly prevalent amongst their parents' generation. A large epidemiological survey conducted in the Twin Cities found that 37% of Somali women and 25% of Somali men had been tortured and that the torture survivors reported significantly more symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and more physical and psychological problems (Jaranson et al., 2004). Nearly half of Somali mothers were torture survivors; more than a quarter had no formal education; 70% were single parents (Robertson et al. 2006).

In terms of their educational and occupational achievement, the recruits do not fit one profile. Two had criminal records. Zakaria Maruf was a former gang member. Mohamoud Hassan and Abdisalam Ali attended the University of Minneapolis, and Jamal Bana attended the Minneapolis Community and Technical College. That higher achieving youths were targeted by recruiters fits a well-known pattern of recruiters seeking out high-achievers (Gambetta & Hertog, 2007; Horgan, 2009; Post, 2007).

In summary, other than being males between 17 and 30, the recruits were not distinguishable from other Somalis on the basis of risk factors, and included both criminals and high achievers.

**2. What is the process of movement to violent radicalization?** Terrorism researchers (Horgan, 2009) have identified some characteristic attitudes in terrorists from other contexts that are important elements of the process of movement to violent radicalization: temporary emotional state; dissatisfaction with current activity; desire to do something; identification with victims; belief that there is nothing inherently immoral in violence; an expectation of reward to accompany increased involvement; kinship or other relevant social ties. Reflecting upon these characteristics and what has been discussed publically we can make some preliminary claims regarding the process of movement.

These youth were motivated by the 2006 Ethiopian invasion of Somalia of which the recruiters appeared to make deliberate and strategic use. It is important to recognize that the idea of defending your homeland is not in and of itself a radical idea. Thus it was possible for youth to be motivated more by nationalist sentiments than by specifically anti-American or anti-Western sentiments. The recruiters did not necessarily have to evoke radical ideas in order to get the youth to want to return to Somalia. They could have been radicalized later when they got to Al Shabaab training camps. Indeed, it appears that one youth, Burhan Hassan, a high school senior and A student at Roosevelt High School who dreamed of attending Harvard, was killed in Somalia by Al Shabaab, perhaps because he was resistant to violent radicalization.

Community and family members said that they believe the radicalization happened very fast. If this is true, then it could in part be a function of rapidly shifting adolescent identity. It could also have been the perceived urgency of the situation in Somalia. But it could also be because observers did not see the processes of change unfolding in the youth. Retrospectively, families say that the youth were unusually "pensive" and "serious" in the months leading up to their disappearances.

Because Somali adolescents stayed connected with Somalia through the Internet, the recruits were likely to have been exposed to violent imagery and extremist ideology on the Internet prior

to their radicalization. One said, "Somalis are the most wired of all African refugees. When someone is killed, even in a village, we watch it on You Tube" (personal communication). For example, Mohamoud Hassan read jihadist material on the Internet and listened lectures by the Yemeni cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, as have multiple other terrorist suspects in the U.S. (Shane, 2009), including the five U.S. Pakistanis (Gilani and Perlez, 2009). It is likely that after being catalyzed by a recruiter, individually and as a group, the new recruits went deeper and further into available Internet materials.

Information on the recruiters is still emerging as the investigation is ongoing. It is reported that the first recruiters were Somalis from Europe who had returned to fight in Somalia in 2005. They actively tried to reach Somali youth in Minneapolis. These recruiters' relationships with their recruits suggests some similarities with the "bunch of guys" description of Marc Sageman (2005), whereby an informal network of friends together progress deeper and deeper into religious extremism and eventual terrorism. However, available evidence also suggests elements of a more top-down recruitment process whereby young men with prior militant experience and the active support and coordination from the Al Shabaab terrorist organization in Somalia sought out younger men in the U.S. (Associated Press, 2009). At this point, not enough is known to more definitively clarify the issue of whether mobilization was more top-down or bottom-up. On November 23, 2009, the FBI unsealed charges filed against eight American citizens involved in the recruitment effort (Elliot, 2009). These included two men accused of recruiting, Cabdalaahi Ahmed Faarax and Abdiweli Yassin Issee, and a third man, Mahamud Said Omar, accused of helping with finances.

Reports on the ongoing investigations in Minneapolis indicate the extent to which the Al Shabaab organization actively reached into the U.S. One recruiter, Zakaria Maruf, operated from southern Somalia using individual phone calls, conference calls, email, listservs, and Facebook to reach out to other youth in Minnesota, many of whom he knew from his years in Minnesota (Elliot, 2009). He wrote, "Bring your self over here...to M-town" (Elliot, 2009). A terrorism consultant, Clint Watts, stated "I think the biggest recruiter for a foreign fighter is the *former* foreign fighter" (Banerjee, 2009, emphasis ours). Al Shabaab also used sophisticated propaganda videos that showed martial arts, automatic weapons, dead bodies, and suicide bombers. Terrorism consultant Evan Kohlmann stated, "I would say they were among the most explicit, the most violent, and the most enthusiastic videos of any jihadi organization out there" (Forliti, 2009).

Some other critical issues remain unresolved. One key question relates to the precise reason the youths left the U.S. Somalis in Minneapolis debate whether youth were recruited to be "freedom fighters" against Ethiopian forces, or to be militant extremists to fight the West, or whether they went for what locals call "reculturation." The latter is found in many refugee and immigrant communities, where wayward adolescents are sent back to their home country to help them get back on track through immersion in their culture of origin (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Regarding the role of religion in this mobilization, the youth who were first mobilized were regular attendees of Abubakar As-Saddique Islamic Center, the largest Somali mosque in Minneapolis, located two miles from Cedar-Riverside. In 2007, Zakaria Maruf started attending mosque and speaking with other youth about the need to turn to religion. The second wave of youth that mobilized did not come from strong religious backgrounds, but found religion after the Ethiopian invasion, when Somali nationalist sentiments were on the rise and amplifying religious beliefs.

Mohamoud Hassan, a 2006 graduate of Roosevelt High School, attended the University of Minnesota where he was vice president of the Minnesota Somali Student Union, and became interested in radical Islamic teachings downloaded from the web and in going to Somalia. On his Facebook page, Mohamoud Hassan wrote: "Allah will never change the situation of a people unless they change themselves ...take a sec and think about ur situation deeply what change do u need to make" (Elliot, 2009). His friend reported, "If it was just nationalism, they could give money. But religion convinced them to sacrifice their whole life" (Elliot, 2009). Some of these youth may have been convinced to participate in extremist activities in response to what they may have perceived as the West's "non-religious and profane view of the world and society" (Kalin, 2004, p. 176).

The known recruiters were male, older, former fighters. In a patriarchal culture, they could supply the necessary authority to these youth, many of whom were raised by single mothers. One of the recruiters, Zakaria Maruf, knew several of the boys through community networks. Many community members assume that there are more recruiters in their community that have not yet been identified or charged. Terrorist recruitment is said to involve the following stages: preparing, spotting, indoctrinating, and mobilizing. In this case, preparing and spotting may have taken place at sites where Somali youth and young men already gather, such as clubs, mosques, living places, and work places. Though the recruits became more involved in mosques after their radicalization, there is no evidence that imams or mosques were directly involved and no charges have been filed against them.

We do not know for certain how easy or difficult it was to recruit these boys and men, however, given that they were able to get some high achievers to go, it appeared relatively easy. We do not know whether: 1) others were asked but said no (and what became of them); 2) others said yes, but were unable to mobilize due to logistical difficulties; 3) others said yes, but were stopped by FBI or local police actions.

What is certain is that the mobilized youth did not tell their parents of their intentions before they left. Halima Abdi reported that after her son, Mohamed Hassan, was missing for 10 days she received a phone call: "Mum, it's your son Mohamed. I came to Mogadishu to fight against the enemies of Somalia" (Hassan, 2009). Parents reported that they suspected that the mosque or clubs were places that youth could get recruited. One characteristic of families from Somali is that parents do not typically talk with their youth about their daily activities and contacts. Parents are often unaware of what is going on at school or after-school, which in most cases puts the youth at risk of poor school performance, dropping out, drugs, and gang involvement, but in this case meant less family protection against violent radicalization. If anything, parents were acting on the perfectly understandable assumption that going to the mosque is a good thing, certainly better than hanging out in the neighborhood where they could be subject to violence or drugs or the wrong crowd. To this day, the families of the missing boys and men are divided with respect to their allegiance to their mosques. Some with children missing have resisted speaking with the FBI or local law enforcement, believing that if they work through the mosque, they have a better chance of seeing their children again. Others have spoken with law enforcement and have spoken out against the mosques.

In summary, political instability in Somalia, the 2006 Ethiopian invasion, social difficulties in U.S. refugee communities, family instability, and local networks, all adeptly exploited by extremist recruiters, have together created contextual risks for violent radicalization amongst those Somalis resettled as refugees in the U.S. as children and adolescents.

### ***3. What should be the approach to those who joined Al Shabaab and either have returned***

***or may possibly return at a later date?*** Presently, three of the recruits have pled guilty and are in federal custody and one is being held in the Netherlands. At least seven Minnesota Somali men are believed to be still in Somalia with Al Shabaab. This does not rule out the real possibility that there are other U.S. Somali men in Somalia, either from Minnesota or from other U.S. locations. Somalis may also have mobilized from other locations in the diaspora including Canada, Western Europe, or Australia.

John Horgan, in Walking Away from Terrorism, distinguished between disengagement and deradicalization. Disengagement is when individuals change their roles in the movement and reduce their participation in violent activities. Deradicalization refers to reducing their commitment to and involvement in violent radicalization such that they are not at risk of participation in violent activities. Horgan claims that disengagement, not deradicalization, is a more attainable goal but as with violent radicalization, this is a complex process.

With respect to the Minnesota Somalis, key concerns are whether the recruits could commit terrorist acts in the U.S. or at overseas targets related to the U.S. and its allies as a consequence of their training and indoctrination. One area of deficiency in our field is just how could that risk be determined. Despite efforts to develop rigorous assessments, there are as of yet no reliable ways to know for certain.

Another concern is how can we act in such a way to inhibit not only individuals but to stop the group movement. The U.S. government has prosecuted or indicted these individuals for their criminal behavior, hoping that this will serve as a deterrent to others. However, one unexamined question is whether Somalis are sufficiently allied with the U.S. law enforcement system to cooperate. Pursuit of individuals could have the unintended consequence of contributing to the movement of others in the U.S. towards violent radicalization who will see this as an issue of oppression of Muslims by the U.S. government. Recruiters looking for every opportunity will no doubt exploit this and represent it to potential recruits as oppression.

***4. Can violent radicalization reoccur with more U.S. Somali youth?*** Many in the Somali community fear yes and I share their concern. One, they suspect that many more U.S. Somali boys and men have been radicalized and recruited (though not yet mobilized) than is publically revealed. Two, Al Shabaab is still active in Somalia and on the Internet and likely has recruiters on the ground in the diaspora, although it has lost some appeal in Somalia and in the diaspora. Three, the underlying “push” conditions in Minneapolis have not changed, and if anything have become exacerbated in the current economic crisis. Four, no additional preventive measures have been put in place that could serve as a “counter-pull”. Others in the Somali community say that the pull factors were the product of a unique historical moment (the Ethiopian invasion) that is unlikely to happen again. But even they add that the push factors have not been addressed to any degree and that Somali nationalism and Islam will manifest again in a new way.

What the media hasn't yet picked up on is the possibility that Somali youth who were recruited but not mobilized could decide to act on their own in the U.S. All it takes is one person with the right weapons to do great harm and pierce the American consciousness. Another possibility is that a Somali who wasn't recruited could turn to violent radicalization as either a wannabe or a lone wolf, like like Dr. Hasan at Fort Hood.

Some conditions are changing for the better in the Minnesota Somali community. More youth are going to college, however they are disproportionately female, as many males drop out of high school. More families are moving to the suburbs, where they find themselves in less ghettoized and more integrated communities and schools. These are expected socioeconomic

changes in a refugee community. At the same time, the present global economic crisis has impacted U.S. Somalis in terms of unemployment and underemployment and cutbacks in already strained social, mental health, and educational services. Of special concern is that more Somali young people will get U.S. passports and will travel abroad, making it harder to monitor and to distinguish those mobilizing for training from those visiting family. Thus the improving conditions in the Somali community should not give us false assurance of lower risk for violent radicalization.

Somalis are not our only concern. Our concern should include all those from failed states that house extremist militant movements. At present that includes Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran. In the past few weeks we have seen several troubling examples of “homegrown terrorists” from the U.S. Pakistani diaspora, including David Headley and other U.S. citizens who apparently planned to commit jihadist terrorist acts abroad.

Lastly, the enhanced U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and Pakistan could have the effect of again inflaming U.S. Muslims, including but not limited to Somalis, to move towards violent radicalization.

#### ***5. What steps could help to prevent violent radicalization in U.S. diaspora communities?***

Counterterrorism prevention in the U.S. is largely approached as an activity of intelligence gathering and law enforcement. Regarding the Somali recruitment, the FBI has investigated those who have committed crimes or those about to do so (not only expressing radical ideas, but financing or joining or recruiting for a terrorist organization). The 2006 National Implementation Plan gave federal and local law enforcement more powers to gather intelligence in the U.S. such as travel patterns. But there are limits, say with respect to investigating those who are radicalized perhaps on their way to violent radicalization, such that putting all young Somali or Pakistani men on a no-fly list would be regarded as a violation of their constitutional rights.

The community is regarded as a source for tips and a site for conducting individual investigations. As far as I know, the FBI does not attempt any deliberate or systematic community-level involvement or programming. It is left up to local police to do the community policing with ethnic minority communities, but outside of large urban areas like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, community policing does not reliably incorporate counterterrorism activities. And very rarely do those counterterrorism activities move beyond intelligence gathering and criminal investigation to include community-based counterterrorism prevention strategies (Downing, 2009).

Few existing programs have attempted to utilize psychosocial approaches to mitigate radicalization and to prevent recruitment. The most notable effort is the government-run Preventing Violent Extremism initiative in Great Britain (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2007). The central aims include: 1) Challenging the violent extremist ideology and supporting mainstream voices; 2) Disrupting those who promote violent extremism and supporting the institutions where they are active; 3) Supporting individuals who are being targeted and recruited to the cause of violent extremism; 4) Increasing the resilience of communities to violent extremism; 5) Addressing the grievances that ideologues are exploiting. To date, this project has reported significant achievements. There is a clear need to learn from such programs and let their experience inform the development of U.S. initiatives with Somalis and other groups. However, it is also clear that interventions that worked in one sociocultural setting are not readily exportable to another without significant and context-specific modification. For example, the scale of Pakistanis in the U.K. is simply much greater than that of any

particular Muslim community in the U.S., so that difference would have to be addressed.

One central aim of counterterrorism is to inhibit potential recruits from joining terrorist organizations in the first place. In addition to intelligence gathering and law enforcement, especially focused on eliminating recruiters, there is a need to work with communities and families to counter radicalization and recruitment. This type of practice can utilize a psychosocial perspective and strategies derived from public health interventions (Psychosocial Working Group, 2002 & 2003). These could operate at multiple levels to both diminish push factors and to enhance counter-pull factors. What we learned from the case study thus far indicates some different ways this could be approached:

**A. Identify community and family protective resources.**

**B. Develop and disseminate credible counter-narratives to those offered by recruiters and websites.**

**C. Educate and support parents to increase their knowledge, awareness, and prevention skills regarding recruitment of youth.**

**D. Address community level push factors through better provision of services and resources.**

**E. Build community-level preventive interventions that seek to increase community support for youth, especially where recruiters are active.**

**F. Enhance community to service organization collaborations.**

**G. Form multidisciplinary collaborations.**

**A. Identify community and family protective resources.** Because Somali youth come from families who left Africa and moved to the U.S. in search of a better life, we would attempt to tap into the hopes and dreams that they carry with them. Though many live in difficult circumstances, most have reported satisfaction with their lives in the U.S. (Halcon et al, 2004; Robertson et al, 2004). A psychosocial approach is based on the assumption that susceptibility should be modifiable by strengthening the family and community protective processes found even amidst adversity (Note: protective resources are defined as family and community characteristics that stop, delay, or diminish negative behavioral outcomes, to include violent radicalization, in at-risk refugees and migrants). This basic assumption has been validated in a range of public health interventions concerning violence, drug use, and HIV in highly adverse conditions (Ashery et al, 1998; Group for Advancement of Psychiatry, 1999; O'Connell et al, 2009; Trickett, 2005). Thus one key research question from a psychosocial perspective is: *What are the potentially modifiable family and community protective factors that impact violent radicalization?* Mixed ethnographic and survey methods such as are being implemented in studies of refugee adolescents from other ethnic groups offers means to accurately answer this question (Weine, Ware, & Lezic, 2004; Weine, 2006). Findings from other diaspora communities point to the roles of parenting, parental involvement in education, organizational outreach to families, mentoring, and faith communities (Weine, 2009).

**B. Develop and disseminate credible counter-narratives to those offered by recruiters and websites.** There has been increased interest in understanding and developing narratives and counter-narratives (Competing Networks and Narratives Weekly, 2009; Weine, 2006). From examining the U.S. Somali cases we have identified several potential themes that could be used in narrative scripts for youth and for parents: 1) Your families came to U.S. to get you out of war-torn Somalia, so why should you return there; 2) The conditions of war in Somalia are far worse than what you can imagine; 3) The people of Somalia will not look at you as a real Somalian, but as an American. They will not welcome you; 4) You are not being recruited to fight as a soldier against an army, but to become a terrorist; 5) Your family in the U.S. will suffer

greatly if you go to Somalia. If you survive, you will be considered a terrorist and a criminal by the U.S. government; 6) You will be subject to divisions and fights between clans and sub-clans in Somalia; 7) You can better serve Somalia by helping to build the diaspora community here through your education and career and participation in Somali and American civic organizations.

**C. Educate and support parents to increase their knowledge, awareness, and prevention skills regarding recruitment of youth.** We would design family interventions for Somali families based upon contextual knowledge of the complex social circumstances of refugee and immigrant youth. These interventions would target those at the highest risk (e.g. males, ages 12-25, with single mothers). For example, there is a profound worry among many U.S. Somalis that parents cannot control the behaviors of teens and young men. However, what is learned from those who are not radicalized may help in understanding what can be provided for those at risk of radicalization. Some parents and community leaders do actively talk with youth about radicalization and recruitment. Through interviews and observations of parents and community leaders and the utilization of qualitative research methods of data analysis it should be possible to learn: *what exactly do the parents say and why, how is it received by youth, and do these messages impact the youths' behaviors?*

These insights could help to craft parenting education and support interventions (e.g. teaching families to talk about recruitment, helping parents to take practical steps such as hiding passports and monitoring Internet and email use) that aim to reduce susceptibility to recruitment through changing family support in a way that the community recognizes as helpful. National Institute of Health (NIH)-funded research to support refugee families has been shown to be feasible, acceptable, and effective (Weine, 2008). Multi-family groups such as the CAFES (Coffee and Family Education and Support) program have been shown to be effective in changing individual behavior by improving family communication (Weine et al, 2005; Weine et al, 2006, Weine et al, 2008). Similarly, a Somali Mothers Health Realization intervention has enabled mothers to distance themselves from negative intrusive thoughts so as to promote proactive common-sense parenting strategies (Robertson, 2004). These successful approaches could be extended to countering radicalization and recruitment with Somali families, and naturally would require rigorous ongoing assessment to determine their effectiveness in that process.

**D. Address community level push factors through better provision of services and resources.** Another pressing need is to address the lack of adequate solutions to deal with secondary migration, so prevalent among U.S. Somalis. This term reflects the movement by most of the Somali refugees to Minnesota from their initial place of resettlement elsewhere in the U.S. For example, Shirwa Ahmed's family was resettled in Portland and Mohamoud Hassan's had lived in San Diego. The majority of Somali refugees presently in Minnesota moved there without having funds and services dedicated to them; those funds remained in the state of first resettlement (Haines, 1996). This has become a serious deficiency, not least given the high number of resettled refugees who move to Minnesota following their initial resettlement. Significant improvements are needed both in decreasing the motivation for moving (e.g. not separating refugees from family members and providing adequate housing and employment), in counseling those who are considering moving, and in providing adequate services to those who nonetheless do relocate to Minnesota.

Yet another key deficiency is the difficulty in responding to the particular needs of adolescent refugees themselves (Ellis et al, 2008). This subgroup of refugees is typically the most vulnerable to behavioral and criminal problems, but invariably also tends to receive less help from service organizations. For the most part, much younger children tend to receive more

targeted after-school services and parental involvement in education. Far less help is offered for adolescents and young adults to find vocations and to integrate into mainstream society. Addressing these problems in Somali and other groups' refugee resettlement could play a role in diminishing and limiting the impact and expression of local grievances concerning inadequate educational, health, social, and mental health services, thus reducing the 'push' and improve the counter-'pull' in refugee communities.

**E. Build community-level preventive interventions that seek to increase community support for youth, especially where recruiters are active.** Beyond family interventions, we must design interventions that work with U.S. Somalis at multiple community levels. For example, it is expected that youth with local role models who have either integrated or speak positively about integration are less interested in or supportive of radicalization. Through examining these community influences upon youth, drawing upon successful intervention models, and carefully adapting them to the targeted refugee communities, pilot projects could be developed.

In Minnesota, for example, community projects could aim to: 1) provide Somali male mentors for Somali refugee youth who encourage their development, careers, and education; 2) form a network of local and state leadership groups to provide leadership development and encourage refugee youth to participate in civic engagement and public service; 3) provide training and tools to imams and community leaders on how to identify and prevent recruiters from gaining access to Somali youth in the mosques, in order to protect both the youths and their communities from harm in the short- and long-term. Because no one intervention is going to reach all in a community, deploying multiple interventions in different community sectors would be warranted. Pilot projects would necessarily be rigorously assessed for feasibility, acceptability, effectiveness with measurable outcomes, and processes of change.

**F. Enhance community to service organization collaborations.** Successful psychosocial projects with U.S. Somalis must involve communities as active collaborators in developing, refining, and testing interventions through partnerships with local associations, schools, mosques, and clinics. The establishment and maintenance of these partnerships is a considerable challenge. However, successful partnerships have been achieved by community services research collaborations working in many difficult settings while addressing public health problems that are no less vexing than terrorism (Stevenson, 1994) as well as through community policing. Counterterrorism efforts could learn from what prior programs have found regarding impediments to collaboration as well as helpful facilitators, such as incorporating community values, being responsive to local needs, providing incentives, and sharing information (McKay & Paikoff, 2007).

**G. Form multidisciplinary collaborations.** This psychosocial approach to counterterrorism does not currently represent a focus of counterterrorism, law enforcement, education, social and mental health services, or academic scholarship. To be effective, however, the psychosocial approach to counterterrorism will require input from these varied domains. This episode with U.S. Somalis has revealed knowledge and practice gaps that call for the development of a new type of program that would enhance law enforcement's, psychosocial workers', and community agencies' abilities to prevent, predict, and investigate terrorism in the highly complex and fluid community contexts where they work – in this case, U.S. diaspora communities linked in some way with failed states and extremist militant movements. This could be accomplished by bringing together key stakeholders from these arenas through consultation, research, and training to provide constructive interventions for preventing the involvement of refugee children and young adults in terrorism. Similar multi-disciplinary program models, such as the Yale Child

Development-Community Policing Partnership, have proven highly effective in creating and implementing programs concerning child victims of violence (Marans & Berkman, 1997). The specific aims of such a collaborative initiative could include: 1) enabling psychosocial expertise to directly support the decision-making and activities of counterterrorism law enforcement; 2) conducting analysis and research on emergent counterterrorism/ psychosocial issues that will help to develop and enhance counterterrorism (as described above in the ethnographic study); 3) designing and implementing collaborative programs for terrorism prevention (as described above in the intervention pilot study); 4) providing education, training, technical assistance, fellowships both to counterterrorism and law enforcement on psychosocial issues and to psychosocial workers on counterterrorism.

## **Conclusions**

Although a new large wave of Somali recruits going abroad is unlikely to repeat itself, there is clearly a substantial risk for homegrown terrorism amongst U.S. Somalis and other Muslim refugee groups from failed states with violent extremism. The situation of Somalis in Minnesota is an opportunity to explore a new path in counterterrorism for managing those risks through a psychosocial approach. A path we may very well need.

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Table 1 Information on the Alleged Recruited and Recruiters from Minnesota

Name	Age *	Residence in Minnesota	Education & Employment	Outcome
<b>First Wave (left Minneapolis in 2007)</b>				
Khalid Mohamud Abshir	26	Minneapolis	Unknown	Indicted; believed to be in Somalia
Shirwa Ahmed	26	Minneapolis (moved from Portland)	2000 graduate of Roosevelt High; worked near Towers; became religious in 2003	Killed October 29, 2008 in suicide bombing
Salah Osman Ahmed	26	New Brighton	Attended North Hennepin Community College; worked as security guard	In federal custody; pled guilty
Kamal Said Hassan	24	Plymouth	Worked as waiter near Towers; attended Minneapolis Community and Technical College in 2006; on resource committee at mosque	In federal custody; pled guilty
Badiftah Yusuf Isse	25	Minneapolis (moved from Seattle)	Worked at car rental company Active in mosque youth program	In federal custody; Pled guilty
Zakaria Maruf	30	Minneapolis (moved from San Diego; lived in Towers)	2000 graduate of Edison High; criminal record since age 14; employed at Walmart; also served as recruiter	Killed July 11, 2009 in Mogadishu
Ahmed Ali Omar	24	Minneapolis (lived in Towers)	2004 Edison High graduate; emergency medical technician	Believed to be in Somalia
<b>Second Wave (left Minneapolis in 2008)</b>				
Abdikar Ali Abdi	?	Hopkins, (a Minneapolis suburb)	Attended mosque in St. Paul	Believed to be in Somalia
Abdisalam Ali	19	Minneapolis (moved from Seattle; lived in Towers)	Edison High graduate; president of Somali Student Association; health student at U. Minnesota; wanted to become a doctor	Believed to be in Somalia
Jamal Sheikh Bana	19	Minneapolis (moved from Georgia)	Engineering student at Minneapolis Community and Technical College and Normondale College; worked at Macy's and as security guard at public housing	Killed in Mogadishu
Burhan Hassan ("Little Bashir")	17	Minneapolis (lived in Towers)	Senior at Roosevelt High School; spent a lot of time at mosque; wanted to attend Harvard	Killed June 4, 2009 in Mogadishu by Al Shabaab
Mohamed Hassan ("Miski")	17	Minneapolis (lived in Towers)	Senior at Roosevelt High	Killed in Mogadishu
Mohamoud Hassan	21	Minneapolis (moved from San Diego)	2006 graduate of Roosevelt High; electrical engineering student at U. Minnesota; vice president Somali Student Union	Killed September 4, 2009 in Mogadishu
Troy Kastigar	27	Minneapolis	1999 graduate of Robbinsdale Cooper High; criminal record; convert to Islam	Killed in Somalia
Mustafa Ali Salat	18	Minneapolis	Lived in St. Paul; senior at Harding High; member of wrestling team	Indicted; believed to be in Somalia
<b>Recruiters</b>				

Cabdulaahi Ahmed Faarax	32	Bloomington	Former combatant Divorced father of 2	Indicted; believed to be in Somalia
Abdiweli Yassin Isse	24	Minneapolis	Unknown	Indicted; believed to be in Somalia
Mahamud Said Omar	43	Minneapolis (moved from Virginia)	Divorced father of 3; worked as a janitor at the Abubaker as-Saddiqui Islamic Center	Indicted (for financing recruitment); held in Netherlands

\*Age is defined as when they left the U.S., not necessarily age when radicalized. For alleged recruiters, ages are at time of indictment in 2009.

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### **Background on Working Group:**

The Working Group on Somali Youth and Psychosocial Counterterrorism is an interdisciplinary group comprised of psychiatry, nursing, and public health professionals. It was formed as an outcome of a conference in Saudi Arabia in early March, 2009, organized by the Research Strategies Network, an affiliate of the Critical Incident Analysis Group, and the Saudi Ministry of Interior, where Working Group members presented a case study of the Minnesota Somalis. The Working Group includes U.S. and Somali members (biographies attached) who have worked extensively in U.S. refugee communities (Somali, Oromo, Bosnian, Kosovar, Burundian, Liberian), with torture/trauma-and migration-affected persons in multiple conflict and post-conflict countries, who conduct NIH-funded research programs with refugee youth and families, and who work in terrorism studies.

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