Background of the Terrorism Study
Dr. Sageman began by explaining how he came to study terrorist networks. After September 11, 2001 he was concerned that some of those involved in the attacks were people he might have known during his years in Afghanistan. He discovered that they were not involved, but that little was known about the attackers. This was especially true in academic studies of terrorists.

Needed incident-based data
- Not terrorist based which was all that was available
- Wanted to know how terrorists got involved in terrorism
- Was told that terrorists had to be interviewed clandestinely
  - Those that were in prison would only lie

First noticed that those involved in terrorism had middle class backgrounds
- Not what was generally said – roots in poverty
- Need to look at what data says
  - Can now do a lot with modern research tools and internet information
Wanted to build a data base that could use scientific methods to explain terrorists better
- Most other researchers started with trying to come up with a definition
  - Really a pointless effort – can always be argued
  - It all depends on point of view
- Started by studying the 19 involved in the 9/11 attacks
  - That soon expanded to 172 cases of known terrorists who were operationally related
  - Now up to over 400 cases with some info on about 800 individuals
Need to present information that can be challenged scientifically
Need to use open source (unclassified) information
- Better than classified sources
  - No one ever goes back and corrects/updates classified info
Trail transcripts from all over the world were great assets
- Shows that some cases were not as compelling as claimed
- The recent arrest reports of the group in Miami shows that they were “clowns”
- The recent situation in Toronto is much more grave
  - Need to look at specifics of each situation
FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Service) is helpful but
- Need two independent sources of info for each database item
  - Academic sources are worthless
  - Assessments must depend on data – not what an authority says is right or wrong
Terrorist Networks Identified
In general they include violent, born-again Islamists in a movement supported by romantic young men
They are chasing a dream for a better world
We need to understand this enemy to defeat it
Like all young they are in a hurry
So will take shortcuts by using violence
Much like anarchists or anti-colonialists in past centuries
May have to expect environmental terrorists in the future
They all wanted utopias
Only the world that they believe in would be free and just
Communists had the same basic idea
Could say that they were still struggling to reach that Utopia
Limited by man’s problems but could reach perfection eventually
In the meantime needed harsh measures
Modern terrorism started with dynamite
Allowed a very few people to have significant impact on the majority
The next step will be their access to WMD

Current jihadist terror organizations started with activity in Egypt
At first those that wanted reform worked within the system
When got nowhere, turned to violence
Then the government authorities cracked down causing greater reactions
Had to leave Egypt and went to Afghanistan
A very small minority came up with the thinking that they had failed because the “Far Enemy”
The US was the main Far Enemy since it was propping up corrupt local governments
Wanted to use violence against the Far Enemy to force them to leave Arab countries

Terror Network Development
Self-selection built the initial networks
Those who went to Afghanistan could not go home for political reasons
Al Qaeda was not the same after 9/11 reactions so less opportunity to choose recruits
In Khartoum, Sudan decided to start attacking the Far Enemy
Only 150 followers gathered around bin Laden
Within 2 months bin Laden has issued his fatwa against the US
In Egypt Dr. al-Zawahiri was becoming a terrorist leader
1996-2001 was the Golden Age for al Qaeda
Had lots of training camps and safe shelters
Funding was available from several sources
Started to convince nationalistic groups to attack the US (Far Enemy)
Instead of their local corrupt governments (Near Enemies)

What the Terrorist Database Shows
Hypotheses could be tested once there were 400 entries in the terrorist database
See http://www.fpri.org/research/terrorism/dossier.html for current version
Dr. Sageman’s presentation contains graphs providing details about the tested hypotheses

Hypotheses:
Terrorists come from poverty: Wrong
Maybe vicarious to appear to be part of the “people”
Over half were middle class

Terrorist had madrassa educations: Only true in Southeast Asia
A few boarding schools had headmasters who specifically recruited likely students

Terrorists are naïve teenagers: Wrong
The average age at the time of joining was about 26.

Terrorists are generally ignorant: Wrong
- About 62% had some university training in a world where only 10% go to college
- Actually higher percentage than the general US population

Terrorists had mostly only religious training: Wrong
- Need to look at those who reached university level
- Most were engineers
  - So they were mostly “arrogant” believing they understood how things work
  - They assumed that they also could read the Koran without help
  - Would fall prey to others who also did not really understand it
  - Like all engineers would go back to the basic principles of the 7th century
    - Did not know/understand the 14th century rethinking of principles

Terrorists suffer from a lack of opportunity: Wrong
- Most had some profession
- Most were underemployed

Terrorists are sexually frustrated so want to blow things up: Wrong
- Most were married
- Women know that there is no sex to die for – men are still looking for it

Terrorists have no family responsibilities: Wrong
- 66% had children and often many of them

Terrorists have criminal backgrounds: Wrong
- Most have no real criminal records
- Some had petty crime records
- French rioters were somewhat different – will discuss later
- Socio-paths would not do well in terror networks – would not follow directions

Terrorists are mentally ill: Wrong
- Only 4 of the 400 showed any signs of psychosis
  - World percentage is more like 3% rather than 1%
- Not really interested in blowing themselves up
- Willing to sacrifice for their buddies
- Not abused as children – if anything, were somewhat over-protected

What Is Important About Terrorists?

Where terrorists joined their networks
- Over 84% were in the diaspora
- Terror is a diaspora phenomenon
- Also true of anarchists of the 19th century
- Being away from the homeland is an element in becoming a terrorist

Why do they become terrorists?
- Only thing they had in common was that they were terrorists
- What was unique were their links to each other – not personal characteristics
- Important: who knew who when
- Looked to see if they knew each other before they became terrorists
  - 68% did know each other before
  - 10% were family members
- Often terror groups started from a “bunch of guys” who got together for some other reason
  - Then they all became radicalized together
Example: the Lackawanna Six whose families came from the same country
Frequently, new arrivals look up people who have already immigrated from the same area
Family reunions become cell meetings
SE Asian groups were a little different because of school ties
When they went to Europe or the US, they did not intend to become terrorists
They get homesick after trying out the western lifestyles
Drift to mosques for companionship, not religion
   Halal theory of terrorism – get together to eat familiar foods from homeland
   Equivalent of Kosher theory of Jewishness – get together to eat
   But also important that they talk at the same time
   Same thing happens with Mafia – eating and talking
Brought together by what is common in their background
   Being together helps maintain those common elements
   Groups can then pass on common elements to next generation
Can look at the groups to see what kinds of food they eat
   Generally not any crossovers
WASPs can’t become terrorists – they don’t talk when they eat
   Don’t use opportunity of meal times to plot and stir each other up
   Compare the meal times of the two families in Annie Hall

How the French situation was different
   Also happening throughout Europe now
Second generation immigrants know that they do not have much chance of improvement
   So become gang members and carry out petty crimes
   After 10 years of that see that getting no further – so try religion

Difference between now and the Golden Age of terror
   Can’t go to Afghanistan and be chosen to be a terrorist
   Now there is no way to connect – too hard to find leaders
Like Harvard, al Qaeda did not need to recruit
   Recruits went to them
   Only about 15% of those who went to Afghanistan were selected
   Harvard takes about 13%

Brain-washing is not involved
   Terrorists learn to believe what their friends believe
   Social bonding then reinforces other bonds – marriages occur with sisters, cousins, etc.
Newspapers often talk about individuals outside of their context
   Misses a lot about terrorists
   Need to find out about that context and who else is involved
Concept of a person’s context is better understood by the police
   Example: one of the group goes to a radical mosque and likes what he hears
   Then he brings in all the rest of his group
   Only 12 mosques accounted for 50% of the terrorists in the database
When become Salafi, start to be radicalized
   Almost like a boot camp, start forming units
   Then individuals are willing to die for each other
   Has been studied since World War II
   Soldiers don’t want to let their buddies down
   Not really fighting for democracy or other broad concept
Development of in-group love brings on out-group hate
   Hate will be based on some facts: injustices and damages to people of the group
   Often there is an escalation of complaints
   The information you trust comes only from your friends
   The born-again are like you so everyone else must be different
   Once in a group, can’t love everybody so no love for out-group
All a matter of small group dynamics
   Of the 7 people involved in the London bombings, 6 were friends
   Once in the group, can’t get out or let down your friends

Interconnected Networks
   Always hear that the #3 al Qaeda leader was killed/captured
   Looking at network diagram, hard to tell who that really is
   Pre-existing relationships are important
   Operational lines follow those pre-existing links

Figure 1: The overlap between personal and operational links within terrorist networks

Dr. Sageman’s presentation provides several other graphical examples of how terror networks grow and change.

Following those lines allows authorities to kill/capture major players
   After 9/11 the US overreached
      Went to Afghanistan and destroyed havens, training camps, etc.
   Al Qaeda central probably no longer works much with some small exceptions
      Certainly no longer in control of all activities
      By physically breaking up the network, edges loss connection to center
      Now lots of loose Indians, no chiefs; no adult supervision
   Groups now must be self-financing and self-training
   Now anyone who wants to can be a terrorist
      Al Qaeda no longer makes the selection
   Result: some are talented, some are clowns (London vs Miami)
Look at the Process of Terrorism

With the Soviets there was a chessplayer concept/mindset
   “They plan out their moves many turns in advance”
Something similar has been said about al Qaeda – “They are patient”
Looking at the networks closely
   Database uses numbers rather than names as identifiers
   To keep unclassified
   Avoids other defamation problems, too
Work shows how different groups get together and interact
   Main factors
      Friendship
      Kinship
      Common home areas
   Can be others
      In Madrid: common thread was drug dealers among nightclub bouncers
Some relationship connections may breakdown
   Members may go to jail for terrorist-related or unrelated reasons
   When in jail meet with members of other existing networks
The big problem is the ability to gather what equipment is needed quickly for an attack
   Police may already have info before an attack so can make arrests quickly afterwards
Random events can influence a network and its attacks
   Cellmates from two different groups meet
   One goes to listen to a new radical preacher then brings the rest
   In Spain, the Crown Price was getting married and needed more protection services
      Extra protection came from counter-terrorist forces taking them from their work
   Tipping point comes when the groups acquire the means of destruction
      Once they do, will move very quickly to action
Terrorists now are often not al Qaeda – may be acting on its behalf
   Internet gives them the ideas
   Internet allows for a virtually invisible hand of organization
   Brains will come from one source, muscles from elsewhere
Amateurs will be making mistakes
   But the police will make even more mistakes
Slight differences between common terrorists and suicide bombers
   In some situations actually avoided use of suicide
   When police got close, then were willing to blow selves up together (buddy support)
Currently it is the “fashion” to blow self up in the effort
   If you do anything else, won’t make the newspapers
Situation in London and Madrid, not 9/11
   Al Qaeda no longer has the coordination necessary to pull off really large attack
   Makes the internet that much more important

The Signature Of The Terrorist
Likely characteristics:
   Young men in the diaspora
   Will travel internationally a lot or may have new passports to hide a lot of travel
   Dramatic change in friendships as they become more Salafi
   Dress the part – short pants, sandals, etc.
   Veiled wives
   Proselytize since they are born again
   May fight with the local, more moderate, imam
      Police may start getting calls about violence at the mosque
      Terrorists believe they can decide what needs to be done and how to do it
   Paintball is a major activity – provides outlet for aggression and para-training
      Would be only a small step to move into live ammunition
Active on jihadi on line chat rooms

Attacks can happen very quickly
  Took only 10 days to plan and carry out the assignation of Sadat
  Easy to do because the group already knows everyone involved
  Biggest problem is getting a means of destruction
    Can act within days of getting it
Suspicous activity comes late in the process
  Casing the target will be done last minute, if at all
  They must be arrested at this point to stop the upcoming attack

QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION

The best time to interdict a terrorist network
  They must have formed a collective identity
  There is a difference between the US and European problems
    Muslims feel that they are against the population at large in Europe
    Less of that feeling here – more opportunities
  Can easily believe that the West is in a war against Islam
  Iraq has only added oil to an existing fire
    The collective identification amplifies what is most relevant to them
Terrorists reject the West and its values
  Wives are very supportive of the cause
  Women with lots of children support jihad by having more
It is not a military function to fight against this type of situation
  Uniformed military people are probably the worst ones to get involved
    Make things look worse
Need to convince terrorists/pre-terrorists that violence is not the right way to solve problems
  In Egypt, they have turned away from violence at the violent 1990s attacks on tourists
  Moderate voices need to be heard on the internet
    Must push the concept that it is only God’s prerogative to decide who dies where
Sageman is not pessimistic about the current situation
  The more violence that is used, the more people will turn away from it
  Will eventually turn off young idealists
The kids who burned cars in France did so because they were French, not Muslim
  Not being treated as French by the native French population – no opportunities
  The government wanted to liberalize work laws but the masses objected
The wave of violence has probably crested, however:
  Some violence will continue
  Americans in uniforms giving weapons to disliked governments does not help

The recent London investigation worked as it was supposed to
  Plot against the airplanes certainly looks like al Qaeda
  Must remember that the authorities are not morons – will have effect
    Must look at terrorists with Western authorities looking at them
  Old al Qaeda is neutralized

Optimistic in the long run
  Atrocities will turn people off
  Terrorists are not religious scholars nor intellectuals
  Only place the US is loved is Iran – because we hate their government
    And they hate their government
  Over the last 150 years the trend has been
    corruption is greed – greed is capitalism – capitalism is the US
  US used to be seen as fair to all and a land of opportunity
Now seen as a hypocrite and a bully
Because there is no one to stop the US
US must show restraint
    Must be a good example for those in Mid East
    US is closer to perfect than any of those corrupt governments
    US must also support the that oppress people against their oppressive governments
        US did support the people vs. the corrupt regimes in the 1950s – 1970s
    US could reverse its current trend in popular opinion
US needs a policy consistent with the country’s core values

Sunni / Shiite Differences
    Both sides hate US support of the regimes that they hate
    Do not hate Americans
    Want to come to the US
Not really a Sunni / Shiite split
    Already happened in Iran 30 years ago

Terrorists don’t read religious scholars, only ideologues
    Researchers of terrorists today may go back to the religious arguments to explain terrorism
        Like Kremlinologists of old who would go back to reading Marx to predict the Soviets
    People did not turn to religion until the regimes became corrupt and were discredited
        The Six-Day War was a turning point
        Moving to Islam is an engineer’s reaction – back to basics
Looking for that utopian dream
    Like the Communists, can always say that they are working toward perfect state
    Once there, will not need a government
    Salafis use the same argument
        When all have Allah in their hearts, all will be virtuous
No terrorist could show in the Koran where his concepts come from
    Might be able to recite a few phrases
    It is a waste of time to try to understand them from religious scholars’ thinking
    There is no deductive reasoning in their thinking

The violence wave has crested – from recent polling data
    Support for terrorism is falling off
    Anti-Americanism is up to about 90% – probably as high as it could be polled
    Muslims also do not like what happened in Saudi Arabia to civilians in attacks
Attraction to the old al Qaeda dream has crested
    However, the US still will have problems
    What hatred remains relates to US policies