

To the Esteemed Members of the United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

In the matter related to the hearing titled, "Jihad 2.0: Social Media in the Next Evolution of Terrorist Recruitment."

Submission by Mr. Mubin Shaikh

On September 11, 2001 I was driving to work when I first heard a plane had struck one of the two towers of the World Trade Center building. Immediately, I exclaimed aloud, "AllahuAkbar" (God is Great). My celebratory moment was quickly muted when I asked myself; what if the very office building I was working in, was similarly struck by a plane? I would have perished along with everyone else just as those innocent people perished on that day. For me and many others, September 11, 2001 was – for all intents and purposes – the beginning of the end of my commitment to the extremist mindset.

Allow me to explain how I even got here in the first place.

I was born and raised in Toronto, Canada to Indian immigrants. As a child, I grew up attending a very conservative brand of "Madressah," which was an imported version of what you would find in India and Pakistan: rows of boys (separated from the girls) sitting at wooden benches, rocking back and forth, reciting the Quran in Arabic but not understanding a word of what was being read.

Contrast that with my daily life of attending public school, which was the complete opposite of the rigid, fundamentalist manner of education of the Madressah. Here, I could actually talk to girls and have a normal, functional relationship with them without it being some grievous sin. When I left the Madressah at age 12 and moved into middle school and high school, I was not discriminated against, bullied, picked on or anything of the like. I was actually one of the cool kids and so were my friends.

But something happened in 1994 when I was 17. I had a house party while my parents were away, which my hyper-conservative uncle walked in on. Normal as it may be to the Western experience, my uncle and other family members were incensed that I would have brought non-Muslim friends to my home and they spent the next few days berating me over what I had done. Due to the sustained guilt-trip I received, the only way I thought I could make amends with my family, was to "get religious."

I would then travel to India and Pakistan and in the latter, ended up in a place called Quetta, which – unbeknownst to me at the time – was the center of the Taliban Shura and of the group known as Al Qaeda. As I walked around the area, I chanced upon 10 heavily armed men dressed in black turbans, flowing robes and sandals. One of them said to me that if you truly wish to bring about political change, it can only be done by using this: and he held aloft his AK47. I was completely enamored by them as Jihadi heroes (a consistent theme in Jihadist literature/media today) and when I returned to Canada in the fall of 1995, I was fully in the mindset of a militant Jihadist. In the years following, I absorbed myself in proclaiming the political and military disasters that had befallen the Muslim world and that "Jihad" was the only way to change things. When Osama Bin Laden gave his fatwa in 1998, I was on board with whatever had to be done.

Then 9/11 happened and I thought: wait a second, I understand the notion of attacking combatants but this? Office buildings in which regular people worked – Muslims included? No, something was fundamentally wrong about this and so, I realized I needed to study the religion of Islam properly to make sense of what I had just witnessed. I sold my belongings and moved to Syria in early 2002 when there was still some semblance of normality in the country. I attended the class of a Syrian Islamic scholar who challenged me on my views regarding “Jihad” and subsequently, spent a year and a half with him studying the verses of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon All God’s Prophets) that the Jihadists used to justify their hate and destruction. After learning some Arabic and Islamic Studies, I came to relinquish my views completely, was filled with great regret over the young people I had myself recruited to “the cause” and returned to Canada in 2004.

In 2004, some individuals in the UK had been arrested on terrorism charges in conjunction with the London fertilizer bomb plot. One of those individuals was none other than my classmate from the Madressah I attended as a child – Momin Khawaja, the first Canadian charged under new counter terrorism laws in the country. I thought this to be a mistake and contacted the Canadian Security Intelligence Service to give a character reference for the family but it was too late for him. As for me, I would agree to work with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service as an undercover operator to help keep Canadians safe because I felt now, this was my religious duty.

I can say that for almost 2 years following my recruitment by the Service, I conducted several infiltration operations both online and on the ground involving religious extremists. In late 2005, one of those cases moved on to become a criminal investigation and I traversed from CSIS to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police – Integrated National Security Enforcement Team in what came to be known as the Toronto 18 terrorism prosecution. I gave Fact Witness testimony in 5 hearings over 4 years at the Superior Court of Ontario. 11 individuals were eventually convicted.

Since my work experience, I have committed myself to assisting governments of the West, especially the various mechanisms of the U.S. government including the National Counter Terrorism Center, Homeland Security (Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties) and the U.S. Department of State, Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications – three main outfits that are engaged in the study and practice of countering violent extremism (CVE) programming.

In addition, I have spent the past few years on Twitter having watched the very start of the Foreign Fighter phenomenon and directly observed recruitment and propaganda by ISIS types online (**See APPENDIX A**). I have directly engaged with many of them – some of whom are now deceased – male and female (**See APPENDIX B**) as well as some of their victims that they have tried to recruit. My approach is to show how wrong they are and to criticize and delegitimize them from the very Islamic sources that they misquote and mutilate. Thusly, the correct term to describe these TIC’s (Terrorists in Islamic Costume) is, KHAWARIJ (**See APPENDIX C**). I have personally intervened in cases of even an America girl (**see APPENDIX D**) that these predators were trying to lure away and put a stop to it by engaging her online as someone who can show her the real interpretation of Islam. Due to this, I have an excellent understanding of what is happening in terms of recruitment and what needs to be done in terms of counter messaging, both from the civic service and NGO side as well as the military side of psychological operations, and I gave a presentation to this effect, at a Special Operations Command

conference in which Commanding General Votel himself was present. There remains a massive gap in all the areas above that I have mentioned and that a sustainable, meaningful and effective counter-messaging approach needs to be created. I submit to you it is not as hard as some may suggest, that we already have talent that just need the direction and guidance in order to get it going.

Finally, as to the conflicting reports of terrorist recruitment in prisons, I submit to you 3 short statements:

1. Terrorist recruitment in prisons is happening all over the world, not just in the U.S. but as for the U.S., the numbers are very, very low as opposed to more volatile places like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan and others.
2. In the Western context, much of this recruiting remains unseen to the untrained eye (and also due to its covert nature) and usually does not manifest openly in the prison institution but afterwards, when the individual has left the facility.
3. Greater vetting of the types of Imams that offer counselling is needed to ensure that pro-social messaging is delivered in the context of prison rehabilitation programs. By framing this under “pro-social” messaging, the state avoids having to declare which version of Islam they “approve” of since we all approve of anything that tends to have healthy, productive and rehabilitative components of counselling.

I thank the committee and my colleagues here with me and hope this is the start of a fruitful discussion in dealing with the challenges and opportunities now before us. Thank you.