



## **CENS Distinguished Visitors Program – Seminar Series Dr. Marc Sageman**

- Global Neo-Jihadi Terrorism in the West – 30 October 2009
- Political Implications of International Migrations – 5 November 2009
- Policy Implications from the Leaderless Jihad – 9 November 2009
- Dealing with Internet Radicalization: Some Practical Suggestions – 11 November 2009
- CENS Distinguished Public Lecture on the Turn to Political Violence – 12 November 2009

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### **Global Neo-Jihadi Terrorism in the West**<sup>1</sup>

**30 October 2009**

Marc Sageman's presentation on "Global Neo-Jihadi Terrorism in the West" detailed the results of his comprehensive survey of global neo-jihadi terrorism in the West, covering the time span of 1988 (the creation of Al Qaeda) to 2008. Sageman defined "Global Neo-Jihadi Terrorism" as the "use of violence by collective non-state actors against non-combatants in the West (the far enemy) in pursuit of a self-appointed global jihad."

The subjects of study were defined as being core Al Qaeda groups, Al Qaeda affiliates, as well as Al Qaeda-inspired groups. His criteria for inclusion in the study were: (i) some loose link (operational or inspirational) to transnational neo-jihadi terrorist organizations; (ii) no lone wolves; (iii) the plots had to have reached a level of maturity; (iv) violent acts targeting Western territory (not financial or personnel support for acts committed elsewhere); (v) some of the planning had to have taken place in the West; and (vi) the operation had to be initiated by the terrorists.

Sources of data for the study included: (i) legal documents (discovery material; trial transcripts, where available); (ii) reports and original research (terrorist documents, interviews and testimony); (iii) media reporting (utilizing a comprehensive, cross-checked, chronological analysis); and (iv) consultation with domestic and international police and intelligence agencies.

During the period under study Sageman noted two distinct peaks in the number of terrorist plots. The first peak, in 1995, relates to the infiltration into France by trained terrorists who were part of the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria (GIA). The second peak, in 2004, Sageman attributed to reactions against the continuing conflict in Iraq.

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These latter plots were described by Sageman as being almost entirely homegrown in nature, lacking command and control by the Al Qaeda core, with the perpetrators having lacked any real formal training. This is an important detail in that Sageman's data suggests that training has a real impact on the outcomes of plots. Those trained by Al Qaeda core or Al Qaeda affiliates have a 20% success rate in causing injuries versus a 9% success rate by those trained by or affiliated with Al Qaeda inspired groups.

In regards to the belief as to whether there were Al Qaeda sleeper cells in the West, Sageman noted that this was not an Al Qaeda method of operation in the West. He defined 'sleeper cells' as individuals "fully trained overseas, [who have] infiltrated the West, gone to sleep and later reactivated to carry out a plot." The only real exception to this was the "Sydney cluster" which was part of the Pendennis plot.

With these parameters, Sageman's findings included 60 known, mature plots from 1993 (1st World Trade Center Attack) to 2008, conducted by 46 operational clusters. These constituted a variety of plots: (i) assassinations; (ii) kidnapping and decapitation; (iii) car bombs (suicide or not); (iv) airplane hijackings (suicide); and (v) IED's (suicide or not). Using the data collected, Sageman developed a "base rate of global neo-jihadi terrorism." About 420 terrorists over 20 years were part of the 60 known, mature plots. Out of a Western population of about 700 million this would give a base rate of 3 per 100 million per year. One of the implications of this is the extreme difficulty in designing effective "tests" to successfully discover terrorists.

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## Political Implications of International Migrations<sup>2</sup>

5 November 2009

By comparing the migration trends and various government responses in the US and Europe, Marc Sageman assessed the long term implications of increasing worldwide migration for US foreign policy. This was achieved through an analysis of the political consequences of the process of migration.

Sageman identified three types of migratory flows. The first pertains to classical immigration countries wherein settlers move into a new country to populate it (e.g. US, Canada and Australia). These immigrants are then treated as future citizens. The second pertains to migrants of former colonized countries moving to the country of their former colonial masters (e.g. UK, France and the Netherlands). Such immigrants tend to be treated less favourably than the native citizens. The third pertains to temporary guest workers working in a host country. Examples of such host countries include Germany, the Gulf States and Singapore. These migrants are accorded limited civil rights with no prospects of permanent settlement or family reunification. The second and third cases are the two trends that shape the Western democracies' experience with migrants (primarily socio-economically marginalized ones) today.

With regard to the marginalized migrants, they started out as guest workers whose stay was expected by the host states to be temporary. However, due to the relatively worse prospects in their home countries, many of these guest workers decided to stay and brought in their families. As the majority of these migrants were unskilled workers from rural areas, they eventually formed a segregated underclass. Moreover, nationalist sentiments in many European states promoted an ethnically homogenous national identity, giving rise to racism and anti-immigration movements. Although guest workers eventually gained more civil rights, the majority still lack the power to influence policy-making.

Sageman outlined three policies towards immigrants. The first is the differential exclusionary model for guest workers. As these immigrants are not considered part of the nation, they face restrictive rules that allow for them to work in the country but are excluded from society. The second is the assimilation model adopted by many countries of immigration which actively creates favourable rules for the absorption of immigrants into society. The third is the multicultural model which entrenches pluralism in two ways. The first is via top-down state policy involving the legislation of the acceptance of diversity by securing equal rights for minorities. The second is the laissez-faire approach whereby acceptance of diversity is the social norm even without state guarantees of social justice or support for ethnic cultures.

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Two types of ethnic formations may emerge. The first is an ethnic community whereby the state and society are open to immigrant settlement and diversity and are thus willing to grant rights and citizenship to migrants. A common characteristic of such groups is that the children of the emerging middle class immigrants take advantage of opportunities for social mobility such as education. As a result, the second generation have the capacity to break out of the poverty cycle. Conversely, the second is an ethnic minority whereby the state and society deny the reality of settlement and diversity and so refuse rights, citizenship and political participation to immigrants. The formation of ethnic minorities often results in marginalization of the immigrants and mutual hostility between the migrants and the citizens.

Sageman then outlined the formation of political diasporas. Such political activism largely stems from active grass-root processes with the objective of self-help for the ethnic community, especially those that face socio-economic discrimination. Nevertheless, there are individuals who provide monetary support to their home countries although the majority of such support is for non-political causes such as disaster relief. Support for dissidents in their home countries are the exceptions and are only of consequence to the host country if the ethnic group forms a significant voting block.

Following from these trends, Sageman drew some conclusions on the long term implications for US foreign policy of the increasing worldwide migration. Firstly, he argued that the fear of an expatriate radical Muslim threat to the US is unlikely. This is because an assumption fuelling such Islamophobia is the irrational fear of a perceived exponential increase in the Muslim population in Europe and Asia; but such demographic growth is grossly exaggerated.

Secondly, he opined that contrary to the belief that immigrants remained more connected to their home country than their host country, most immigrants are more concerned about domestic issues in their host countries relating to their own economic opportunities and discrimination, and rarely about foreign affairs or even home country issues.

Thirdly, a concern in the US that mass migration from the Middle East to Europe may result in a shift in European policy in favour of the Middle East at the expense of European policy towards the US is unlikely because robust economic and political interests between the US and Europe prevail.

Sageman concluded that managing the expatriate terrorist threat requires careful scrutiny of visitors to the US, which is a system already currently in place. On reducing the odds of homegrown threats, he recommended that governments adhere closely to fairness in dealing with immigrant communities.



## Discussion

With regard to Singapore, Sageman identified two groups of migrants. The first group is the guest workers with limited rights and whose presence is temporary. As such, compared to guest workers in liberal democracies, they are not able to organise themselves and are thus unlikely to pose a threat to society. The second group is the foreign talents who have the option of staying in Singapore. Sageman remarked that whether they pose a threat to Singapore's social fabric depends on whether they are ultimately perceived as "desirable" or "undesirable" by the population. Although he observed that there appears to be some discontent towards the Chinese nationals, the success of government policies to integrate them needs time to germinate. Nevertheless, he noted that in most cases of successful social integration of immigrants, government policies tend to have less effect than organic integration based on positive lived experiences.

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## **Policy Implications from the Leaderless Jihad<sup>3</sup>**

**9 November 2009**

### **Introduction**

Marc Sageman's talk focused on the emergence of leaderless jihad through the formation of what he termed the Protest Counter-Culture (PCC) and the dynamics of immigration in the West. Sageman began his presentation by saying that policymaking should be based on a clear understanding of threats and stated that the new threat comes from neo-jihadists, whom he defined as "collective non-state actors targeting non-combatants in the West in pursuit of self-defined global Jihad". Sageman stated that an individual who gets involved in a PCC due to moral outrage as an immigrant might turn to the pursuit of neo-jihadi terrorism as a higher level of expressing moral outrage. Being involved in a PCC may translate into displays of violent extremism, but the real danger lies in the transition of violent extremism to extremist violence.

### **The Protest Counter-Culture and Immigrants**

In an effort to explain the emergence of the PCC, Sageman stated that the PCC comes from a rejection of society combined with political activism. However, a PCC is not the continuation of one form of political protest, but rather a chain of new political protests which emerge due to disappointment towards previous ones. Sageman pointed out that it is important to keep in mind that the PCC is still considered legal in liberal democratic societies as long as it does not develop into extremist violence.

Sageman applied the mechanism of the PCC to the emergence of global neo-jihadi terrorism in the West and said that it is strongly related to the politics of migration. He opined that a PCC of immigrants emerge in the so-called "temporary work migration countries" which are countries that brought in immigrants as a source of labour. Usually, these immigrants are prone to working under harsh conditions. In addition, they are not given any civil rights and the transition from the manufacturing and construction industry to service industry makes it difficult for immigrants who are mostly low-skilled workers to keep their jobs.

Being confined in a disadvantageous and harsh environment without proper education, the immigrants end up excluded and marginalised<sup>3</sup> in the society. Moreover, it is difficult for these immigrants to be involved in domestic politics through climbing a social ladder. Sageman said that instead, they get involved in domestic politics by turning to political activism to win their rights to be treated equally as native workers, which becomes a source for a PCC. Tensions continue to

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escalate when the domestic and international environment reinforces these immigrants' perception of inequality and marginalisation. This becomes a threat to the host country when the immigrants start to perceive that their host country is responsible for the troubles and misfortunes in their home country. Sageman opined that global neo-jihadi ideology sprang from this context. In this connection, Sageman argued that it is important to acknowledge the rights of immigrants and openly assimilate them into the society in order to prevent the emergence of a PCC.

### **From Violent Extremism to Extremist Violence**

Sageman said that the transition of a PCC (which can represent violent extremism) into terrorist violence (extremist violence) fundamentally starts from the moral outrage of an individual towards unequal and unfair treatment towards Muslims. As this moral outrage escalates and they start to perceive the current PCC as ineffective, they decide to pursue a new violent commitment himself which might end up in extremist violence.

Sageman stated that in contrast to the past when most of the terrorism activities were a top-down process, 78 percent of terrorist plots in the west today are a bottom-up process. This change was caused by the internet because it provided a platform for individual homegrown terrorists around the world to be connected with each other. However, Sageman pointed out that the chances that an individual would persevere until the point he commits terrorist violence are actually very slim.

### **Policy Implications**

Based on his analysis of the emergence of neo-jihadi terrorism, Sageman suggested three policy implications: (i) prevent the formation of new terrorist groups; (ii) keep terrorist groups isolated and contained; and (iii) detect, disrupt, and dismantle violent groups.

First, in order to prevent the formation of new terrorist groups, he said that the social marginalisation of immigrants should be prevented, vigorous enforcement of fairness should be pursued, PCC ideology should be challenged, and the potential transition of violent extremism into extremist violence should be monitored and prevented. Sageman added that it is also important to educate the population about the acceptance of diversity and remind them that a nation is built upon the contributions from immigrants.

Second, in order to keep terrorist groups isolated and contained away from the target country, the government should prevent any linkages with transnational terrorism. For example, foreign terrorists should be prohibited from entering into the homeland and any possible routes that may connect homeland terrorists to terrorists abroad should be eliminated as well.



Third, if the government fails to prevent the infiltration by terrorist networks, the next step is to detect, disrupt and dismantle it. This requires international and domestic cooperation between intelligence agencies and police and increased obstacles that would effectively deter terrorist activities.

In closing, Sageman remarked that these policy implications are multi-layered and there is no one-size-fits-all policy. He added that it is important to pay attention to the fundamental cause: i.e. moral outrage of an individual and the emergence of a PCC.

### **Discussion**

A participant asked about using reformed ideologues to challenge the PCC ideology of neo-jihadists and asked if moderate imams would object to giving these reformed individuals a public profile as this might undercut their own authority. To this question, Sageman responded that reformed ideologues may have a stronger persuasive power than moderate imams. Imams are scholars with profound knowledge in their religion but they might lack skills to approach young religious radicals. On the other hand, reformed ideologues can convey their information and ideas based on their personal experiences, to which the young religious radicals might respond to more attentively because they resonate with their own experiences.

Another participant inquired about Sageman's view towards using sting operations to counter this phenomenon of leaderless jihad. Sageman answered that sting operations do have their strengths because it facilitates infiltration into the terrorist plot. However, he said that sting operations are not always the right method because it can manipulate the suspects to behave in a certain way that is desirable for the infiltrators (i.e. authorities). Sting operations should be treated cautiously because it may not only result in wasting time and cost, but also arresting the wrong people who are not actually engaged in terrorist plots.

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## Dealing with Internet Radicalization: Some Practical Suggestions<sup>4</sup>

11 November 2009

### Introduction

Marc Sageman spoke on the ways that the Internet or online media was and could be used by neo-Jihadi terrorists to communicate and gain support for their causes. The Internet was initially used as a propaganda tool to provide 'guidance' and draw attention to a vision. There is minimal direct communication between the information provider and web-user. This passive form of communication persisted till 2003 when computer mediated communication (CMC) evolved and changed the way people exchange information online. Sageman explained, for instance, that it is no longer about reading news on the Internet but the usage of Internet communication tools to build relations and expand one's social capital. He termed such CMC as 'active'.

### History of Internet Usage

Neo-Jihadi Terrorists had originally used the Internet, in particular the electronic mailing (e-mail) system, as a way of communication amongst group members. The emails retrieved from Ayman al-Zawahiri's computer, for instance, contained largely messages or responses written for his teammates. CMC at this stage was perceived by Sageman as being 'passive' in nature. This is because Neo-Jihadi Terrorists' online activities did not involve direct interaction with a wider audience or end-users. The websites run by Azzam and Global Islamic Media Front, for example, had limited appeal and contained 'heroic tales' that were posted to inspire people.

### Direct Communication

The situation changed around 2003 when new and mobile forms of CMC media flourished and real "physical sites" were monitored for terrorist activities. The Internet became an alternative meeting spot where people could gather and meet without drawing much attention or detection. This marks a departure from passive forms of web-based communication such as the posting of information on websites to active ones that engage the end-users in live discussions over, for instance, virtual chat-room gatherings and online forums.

Sageman described the migration of real life activities to the virtual world as a "bottom up process that allows international movement to survive despite a strong physical clamp-down". The bottom-up perspective is also used by Sageman to study the phenomenon of "lone wolves" or individuals like Yehya Kadouri and Kamel Bouchentouf who appear to have radicalized on their own and not belong to any group *per se*. In particular, he noted that they are connected to a wider virtual world

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and are often members of similar interest web-based groups. He pointed out that Younes Tsouli, the administrator of the online forum Muntada al-Ansar, served as a case in point that virtual communication could conceptualise/harden pre-existing ideas or actions and socialise individuals into a wider online network.

### **Al Qaeda, Neo-Jihadism and the Internet**

According to Sageman, Al Qaeda (AQ) did not plan to “co-opt” the online forums into its operations *per se*. He stressed that they were “value-adds” or “internet mouth-pieces”. That said, there are three key implications that the Internet has on neo-Jihadi terrorist (group and individual) behaviour.

Firstly, the structure of the Internet provides for redundancy or group survival. It would be difficult, although not impossible, to eradicate neo-Jihadi terrorist websites entirely as groups could easily maintain and replace several websites.

Secondly, web-users could choose to either conceal or reveal their identities to their preferred audience. This state of “semi-anonymity” gives individuals the freedom to post hate-speeches without exposing their true selves. This therefore allows rivals (different terrorist groups and law enforcers) to co-exist in different online fora.

Thirdly, Sageman likened the Internet to an “Egalitarian” community which encourages leaderless models of neo-Jihadism. This basically meant that anyone has the ability to lead online discussions and challenge the leadership or legitimacy of real groups.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Sageman stressed that online neo-Jihadi fora are created purposefully to reinforce actions and behaviours. It was reiterated that while online activities might appear spontaneous, most neo-Jihadi terrorists and supporters have intentionally sought to reaffirm or harden their existing beliefs through online interactions. Therefore, especially in the case of lone wolves, they are part of a wider and highly networked virtual community.

### **Discussion**

A participant asked if online activities represent the tip of a wider terrorism iceberg and contained any significant embedded messages. Sageman replied that AQ merely piggybacked on the post 9/11 ‘Internet Phenomena’. The extent to which web-based interactions reflect actual societal problems is not certain and remains to be gauged. It was emphasised that Jihadists “do not waste time [building avatars or virtual characters] on [a virtual world like] Second Life. They go straight for chat-rooms.” The Internet is mainly an outlet for them to voice their opinions and has not overtaken ‘real life’ activities.



Given the potential for web-users to plant and spread radical ideas, a participant queried if this calls for a regulation of web-based activities and the Internet altogether. Sageman emphasised in reply that people do actively and purposefully search for information. It is not a passive absorption of information. The regulation of the internet might not be effective in deterring people, who are either already radicalized or looking for information that reinforces their pre-existing thoughts, from going online.

The Internet may or may not have a role to play in the process of “violent extremism”. There is a difference to what is articulated online and actual real life behaviours or actions. It was added, many who “talk violence” do not necessarily follow through their intended actions. Hence, it voices down to the issue of “perseverance” and the need to identify the factors that pushes one to remain dedicated to a violent cause.

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## **CENS Distinguished Public Lecture on the Turn to Political Violence**<sup>5</sup>

**12 November 2009**

Marc Sageman began his presentation by introducing the key aspects of his current research into political violence. His aim is to provide a pragmatic model useful to both practitioners and policy-makers in their attempt to understand why young people turn to violence and whether there is a way of stopping this phenomenon.

Sageman proceeded to define the areas of his research stating that it was based on accurate data collected from trial transcripts. Turning his attention to the number of attacks that have occurred in the past, Dr. Sageman found in the last 20 years from 1988 to December 2008 a total of 60 terrorist plots by 46 groups with a total of 420 members. Taking into account the population of the West which has approximately 700 million people, Dr. Sageman calculates that the base rate is three per hundred million per year. With such a low base rate, Dr. Sageman is of the opinion that in order to catch a real terrorist, just a simple profile or test would not suffice.

He sees the turn to political violence as a two-part process. The first involves the emergence of a protest counter culture, and the second step is the rejection of this protest counter culture resulting in the emergence of violence.

Sageman described these protest counter cultures as utopic in nature, rejecting larger society and forming out of the structurally transitory interstices of society. That is, they are often found in universities, in areas where there are a large number of domestic migrants (rural to urban) or international migrants.

Involvement in the protest counter culture (or 'social blob' as Sageman termed it) is still legal in most democratic societies and there is low risk and low cost to this involvement. On the other hand, there is a high risk and a high cost for those members of the protest counter culture (whom Sageman termed a 'bunch of guys' due to their lack of formal training) who turn to violence. It is the social blob which facilitates the emergence of these 'bunch of guys' to move from violent extremism (that is beliefs or words, often legal in many countries) to extremist violence (physical acts of violence illegal in all societies).

The formation of these 'social blobs' is through the intense efforts of local political entrepreneurs engaging in political activism. Individuals may be invited to political rallies or meetings via friends or relatives. As they spend more time with activists they adopt activists' symbols (e.g. beards, clothing type, etc) and there is an escalation of political activism. At all times, Sageman pointed out, the activities of this social blob are still legitimate.

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The social blob is composed of fluid social networks with vague, diffuse, and porous boundaries. In regards to data Sageman collected on what he termed the “global neo-jihadi social blob” he noted it is an overwhelmingly diasporic phenomenon consisting of young expatriates and second or third generation immigrants. Importantly, social bonds precede ideological commitment, with pre-existing friendships accounting for around 70% of those involved and kinship bonds around 20%, Sageman claimed.

Sageman then discussed the differences in the trajectory of involvement for expatriates and homegrown members of the social blob.

Expatriates tend to be upwardly and geographically mobile who come from traditionally religious and middle-class families; these ‘best and the brightest’ are sent to university in the West. By and large they are global citizens, speaking three or four languages and skilled in information technology. However, separated from their traditional social bonds and culture they become homesick and lonely, ending up feeling marginalized and excluded from society. They may try and adopt a Western lifestyle, but without relief. Seeking friendship, they may drift towards mosques or study groups from which they form cliques and eventually may enter the social blob.

Those second or third generation individuals, from Sageman’s findings, have a different trajectory towards involvement. Often from a secular background, they tend to also feel discriminated and excluded from society but may drop out of school, turn to petty crime and drugs and through that form gangs. This activation of a collective identity, Sageman explained, is reactive and based on resentment. Eventually to escape their personal situation there is a collective drift to political activism and religion.

The group dynamics of the social blob increase a sense of commitment and cohesiveness via a high level of interaction, with the group acting as an ‘echo chamber’ encouraging mutual escalation in participation. Inspirational leaders have a large role in activating a sense of collective Muslim identity through inspiring stories of fighting glories, with members ready to sacrifice for their comrades and the cause.

One of the reasons that members of this social blob may transform into the ‘bunch of guys’ ready to commit acts of extremist violence is moral outrage. This is not sufficient in itself, however. Disillusionment with the effectiveness of the protest counter culture tactics leads to some members rejecting such tactics as ineffective.

One of the more prosaic aspects of involvement in violence, however, is not simply moral outrage but how much time members have available for participation. From Sageman’s data he noted the large amounts of ‘down time’ of those involved in plots.



To that end, many of the members of this group may have no fulltime job commitments or involvement in other protest counter culture organizations.

Sageman then detailed the dynamics of these ‘bunch of guys,’ noting that there is usually no clear leader but rather an active core of two to four people egging each other on. This active core often met randomly and formed cohesiveness around their collective disappointment with, and rejection of, the protest counter culture (or social blob). This separation from the wider social blob and involvement in a conspiracy leads to an increased sense of cohesion. As there is often no clear leader, there is a bottom-up process of self-recruitment and organization, with many conspirators just ‘tagging along’ with the active core.

However, this transition to violence is not a linear path, Sageman noted. Bringing a plot to fruition happens in fits and starts, with varying levels of individual and group commitments. There may also be a limited window in individual’s life trajectory of when they would be willing to engage in violence with such a willingness decreasing with age.

In conclusion, Sageman noted that terrorist plots are rare events given the difficulties and ubiquity of obstacles in the process. Some of these obstacles may be: (i) personal (from friends or family); (ii) due to a hostile environment (from law enforcement activities); or (iii) inadequate social capital on the part of plotters to access sufficient weapons or materiel.

## **Discussion**

An attendee asked Sageman to clarify the difference between ‘violent extremism’ and ‘extremist violence’. Sageman answered that there seems to be a big confusion between the two around the world. Violent extremism is simply talking in a violent way, or about violence. In liberal democracies with freedom of speech protections, words are legal, even if one does not like the words. It is only if words are linked to some action or a conspiracy that they become illegal. Extremist violence, on the other hand, is violence done for extremist reasons, which is illegal everywhere.

Sageman continued that there is a big confusion between talk and action. If one examines these social blobs one sees young people attempting to brag and impress their peers, but this does not constitute terrorism. Governments and law enforcement agencies, according to Sageman, must be subtle in distinguishing between the type of braggadocio found amongst groups of young people and those that actually commit harmful, violent acts.

A participant then asked that if people come out of the social blob and commit violent acts should the social blob itself be illegalized. Sageman answered by stating that it is only violence itself which should be criminalized. He continued by stating that without protest movements liberal democracies would not have achieved levels of



equality. An example put forward was that of slavery and segregation in the United States. It took a long time in the United States to achieve equality of races – including protest social movements and a violent civil war. However, it was the protest social movement of the civil rights era (which was fairly non-violent) that led to equality amongst races in the United States. Additionally, many other movements piggybacked on the civil rights protests movements to achieve equality for other social groups (e.g. women’s rights). Therefore, in a liberal democracy progress would be frozen without the creative element of protest social movements.

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