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**Homegrown terrorism in the West,
1989-2008**

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DIIS Working Paper 2010:30

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ABSTRACT

The London bombings in 2005 led to the perception that the terrorist threat had changed from external to internal. This became conceptualized shortly after as “homegrown terrorism.” This article deals with the meaning and scope of this phenomenon. We begin by tracing an ambiguity in the term “homegrown,” which is both about *belonging* in the West and *autonomy* from terrorist groups abroad. A quantitative study of Islamist terrorism in the West since 1989 reveals an increase in both internal and autonomous terrorism since 2003 and that most plots are now internal—but not autonomous. Finally, we suggest that an increase in autonomous terrorism is a transitory phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the London bombings in July 2005, the threat from Islamist militancy in the West¹ was primarily conceived of in terms relating to the 9/11 attacks: the West was threatened by individuals with close links to a terrorist organization headquartered on the other side of the planet. However, the London bombings did not correspond to the 9/11 format. The bombings appeared to have been planned and carried out by individuals born and raised in Britain without any outside aid or assistance.² Hence, the dynamics previously regarded as transnational had to be recast as domestic. To deal with this seemingly new phenomenon analytically—and to map out how to counter it—several concepts were (re-)invented: “homegrown terrorism,” “radicalization,” and “self-starter groups.” “Homegrown terrorism” soon became the favoured term, but at the same time increasingly unclear. Five years later, we must ask if the threat really did change.

To address this question, we start by unpacking the concept of “homegrown terrorism.” We trace an ambiguity in the concept, which we disentangle by drawing a distinction between two dimensions: *belonging* (to the west) and *autonomy* (from organized terrorist groups abroad). By combining the two dimensions implied in the homegrown concept, we create four ideal types of terrorism in the West: internal autonomous, internal affiliated, external autonomous, and external affiliated.

¹ The West is defined here in geographical terms as North America, Australia, New Zealand, Western Europe (i.e. the old NATO members excluding Turkey) plus Switzerland and Sweden.

² It later became evident that there were links to organized terror groups. Intelligence and Security Committee, “Could 7/7 Have Been Prevented?,” ed. Review of the Intelligence on the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005 (2009).

To examine whether there has been any increase in homegrown terrorism, we created a dataset containing all of the individuals known to have participated in an Islamist terrorist plot or attack in the West in the period 1989–2008.³ Our data indicate a clear increase in both internal and autonomous terrorism since 2003. A majority of the plots today are internal, but not autonomous. Four case studies from Denmark indicate that terrorism emerges from heterogeneous communities in which people with a high degree of *belonging* mix with others with a lower degree of belonging, i.e. people not born in the West but who have either grown up or at least spent several years here. The increase in autonomous terrorism is a recent phenomenon, but we suggest that it is also passing. More recent cases indicate that individuals increasingly seek out accessible terrorist communities abroad in countries, such as Pakistan, Yemen, Chechnya, or Somalia. We therefore suggest that, after a short period with an increase in “internal autonomous” terrorism, terrorism in the West remains internal but increasingly affiliated.

THE DISCUSSION OF “HOMEGROWN” TERRORISM

The term “homegrown” appeared in academic as well as policy-oriented publications after the London bombing in 2005; but what is the meaning of the concept and how is it used?

A review of literature dealing with this issue shows that two main features appear distinctive: the idea of individuals being born and raised in the West—or at least having a strong attachment to the West—and the idea of individuals or groups acting on their own

³ Dataset available on authors’ webpage.

behalf without taking orders from a terrorist group abroad. The coexistence of these two ideas introduces an ambiguity at the very core of the concept, since these ideas coexist without being clearly distinct in much literature. The shock of London included both the discovery that the persons involved were British born and raised, but also that they had apparently acted on their own initiative without any outside interference. This phenomenon was soon conceptualized as “self-recruited,” “self-trained,” “self-radicalized,” and “self-started.” When it later became known that at least two persons had traveled to Pakistan and been in contact with terrorist groups there, it was interpreted as if the group was now “less homegrown” than initially thought to be the case. This article attempts to dispel this ambiguity by distinguishing between “belonging,” which is close to the etymologic meaning of homegrown, and “autonomy,” which is the level of independence from transnational terrorists.

At the core of the notion “homegrown” is the idea of radicalized youth who were born and raised in the West. According to Peter Nesser’s definition, the distinctive feature of homegrown terrorists is the fact that they are “born and raised in Europe.”⁴ Similarly, Thomas Precht⁵ suggests that we understand homegrown terrorism as “acts of violence against targets primarily, but not always, in Western countries in which the terrorists themselves have been *born or raised*.” Precht qualifies this suggestion by adding that a “distinctive factor of homegrown terrorism

is that it is carried out by persons who have had their *formative phase, upbringing and cultural influence* take place in the Western world.”⁶ Genkin and Gutfraind emphasize the importance of citizenship by suggesting that homegrown terrorism should be conceived of as “terrorist acts that are carried out by groups whose membership is composed entirely or predominantly of the *native-born citizens* of the country that is being attacked.”⁷

These definitions initially seem to cover the same phenomenon. Upon closer examination, however, they appear somewhat diverse, since they emphasize very different aspects of the phenomenon they seek to grasp. Nesser presents the most restrictive definition of “born and raised” with a narrow focus on Europe. Precht agrees with Nesser but expands the focus to Western countries outside Europe and emphasizes the role of the “formative years.” By insisting on the “native-born *citizen*,” Genkin and Gutfraind include the citizenship factor while simultaneously omitting the country in which a person was raised or lived his or her formative years. A young man convicted in the Danish Glasvej case was born in Denmark and holds Danish citizenship but was raised in Pakistan and first returned to Denmark at age 18. He would be homegrown according to Genkin and Gutfraind’s criteria of birth and citizenship but not according to Nesser and Precht’s criteria of upbringing.

Moreover, the question of birth, upbringing, citizenship, etc. has been intertwined with “autonomy,” i.e. the independence of a person or group from terrorist environments outside the West. As mentioned, when

⁴ Petter Nesser, “How Did Europe’s Global Jihadis Obtain Training for Their Militant Causes?,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 2 (2008).

⁵ Thomas Precht, “Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalisation in Europe - from Conversion to Terrorism “ in *Research report funded by the Danish Ministry of Justice* (Copenhagen: Danish Ministry of Justice, 2007).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷ Michael Genkin and Alexander Gutfraind, “How Do Terrorist Cells Self-Assemble? Insights from an Agent-Based Model “ *Social Science Research Network*, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1031521>.

the notion of homegrown first appeared in the aftermath of the London bombings, it was surprising both that the instigators were predominantly born and raised in the UK and that they had acted on their own initiative without contacts abroad (at least so it appeared). The notion of the homegrown has, indeed, become part of a more general debate about whether al-Qaeda is currently losing ground or whether—after a brief debacle—it has restructured and is once again ready to command groups and networks in Europe and elsewhere. This debate has been most emphatically formulated by Marc Sageman,⁸ who argues that the current jihad has become “leaderless,” and Bruce Hoffmann,⁹ who suggests that al-Qaeda has consolidated and is able anew to conceive plots and give orders. In other words, Sageman argues that the dynamics of terrorist networks in the West are increasingly “homegrown,” since the push for action comes from below. Conversely, Hoffmann claims that the dynamics are predominantly top-down with al-Qaeda being increasingly back in business.

This question is also present in the conceptualization of “homegrown.” For instance, Aidan Kirby identifies this “distinct and novel phenomenon” as “groups that have little or no affiliation with the original al-Qaeda network, made up of individuals who have never attended a formal terrorism training camp and whose attacks occur seemingly spontaneously, without orders from a member of the known al-Qaeda leadership.”¹⁰ Similarly, Lars

Erslev Andersen understands “homegrown” as those who have “become terrorists without being recruited or trained by people from al-Qaeda.” With reference to the London bombers, he adds that “Not only did they grow up and were educated in British society, but they were also themselves responsible for their evolution as terrorists.”¹¹ Genkin and Gutfraind untangle this ambiguity at the very core of the concept by introducing a distinction between “homegrown” and “self-starters,” which they understand as “terrorist acts that are carried out by small groups of individuals that don’t seem to be *recruited, directed, trained, or financed* by any existing terrorist organization.”¹² Like Kim et al.,¹³ we favour the term “autonomy” for this phenomenon, because self-start is one of several features: Self-radicalization, self-training, self-financing, etc.

Around 2005, it was widely assumed that the new breed of homegrown terrorists had not only grown up in the West but was at the same time autonomous and that the once, almost mandatory stay in an Afghan training camp had now been replaced by the Internet, which constituted a “virtual training camp.” In an article on European jihad and training, Peter Nesser pinpoints this assumption by stating, “It is often assumed that homegrown global jihad cells, for the most part, are relatively *autonomous, self-recruited, self-radicalized, and self-trained.*”¹⁴ In a 2007 article, Bruce Hoffmann identifies a case in which homeg-

⁸ Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

⁹ Bruce Hoffman, “The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism,” *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 3 (2008).

¹⁰ Aidan Kirby, “The London Bombers as “Self-Starters”: A Case Study in Indigenous Radicalization and the Emergence of Autonomous Cliques,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 5 (2007): 415.

¹¹ Lars Erslev Andersen, “Over Alle Bjerger,” *Euroman*, no. 2 (2009).

¹² Genkin and Gutfraind, “How Do Terrorist Cells Self-Assemble? Insights from an Agent-Based Model “.

¹³ Jung Kim, Cheol-Won Lee, and Eul Gyu Im, “Changes of Cyber-Terrorism: Autonomous Terrors and Counter-Measures,” in *Computational Science and Its Applications – Iccsa 2007*, ed. O. Gervasi and M. Gavrilova (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2007).

¹⁴ Nesser, “How Did Europe’s Global Jihadis Obtain Training for Their Militant Causes?”

rown and self-starters did indeed go hand in hand: “Members of the network,” he writes, “are inspired and motivated by al-Qaeda, but have no direct links of any sort: they have never trained in al-Qaeda camps, and they are not following any discernable or identifiable al-Qaeda command and control structure.”¹⁵

Nonetheless, the empirical linkage of internal and autonomous terrorism is soon to be questioned *inter alia* because the London bombers, who were homegrown in the sense of being “born and raised” in the UK, turned out to have had contact with individuals associated with Pakistani terrorist groups. Hence, Evan Kohlman maintains that contemporary homegrown terrorist networks often emerge “with the active support and endorsement of particular high-ranking al-Qaeda spokespeople and military commanders.”¹⁶ Similarly, Precht attempts to nuance the picture by drawing distinctions between different kinds of international links. He maintains that in many homegrown terrorist cases, there has been some level of 1) “international contact,” 2) “visit to foreign countries for ideological inspiration,” or even 3) “training camp attendance.”¹⁷ In other words, Precht touches upon the question of the particular *nature* of the international affiliation. Have the international contacts only been virtual through the Internet? Have the individuals traveled to obtain ideological inspiration, training, or to participate in jihad? Finally, who takes the initiative for the contact? Are the would-be terrorists “recruited” by an al-Qaeda facilitator?

¹⁵ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, second ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Evan F. Kohlmann, ““Homegrown” Terrorists: Theory and Cases in the War on Terror’s Newest Front” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, no. July (2008): 98.

¹⁷ Precht, “Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalisation in Europe - from Conversion to Terrorism”, 31.

Or does the push for international contacts come “from below” on the initiative of the young men themselves?

TYPOLGY

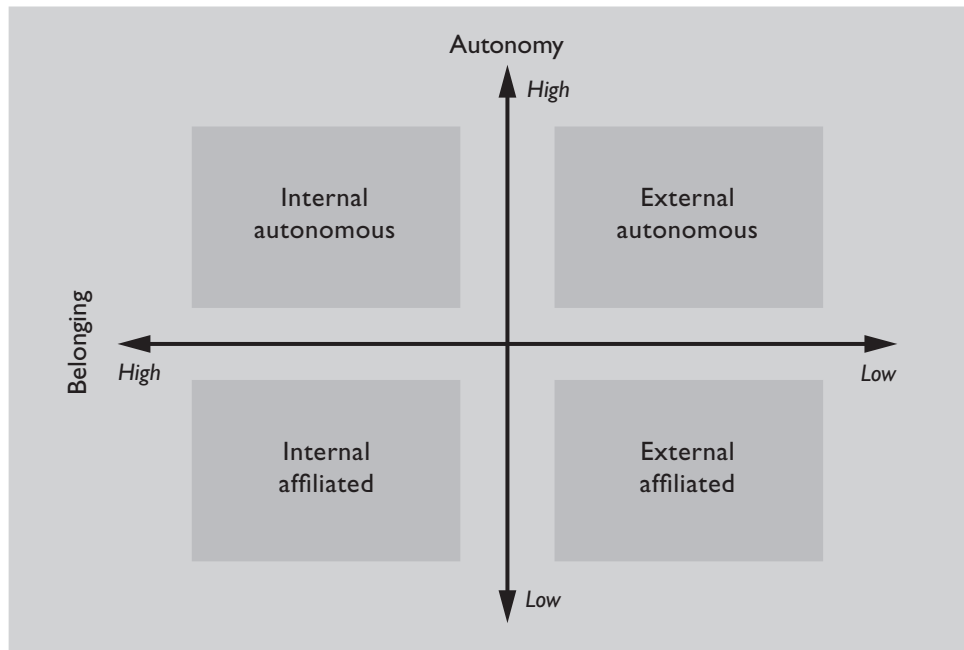
We suggest that the issues raised in this debate be reduced to two separate dimensions: *belonging* and *autonomy*. Belonging to the West is a matter of attachment. Autonomy, on the other hand, is a matter of independence from Islamist militants abroad: To what extent has the group formed, trained, and mobilized resources independently of transnational terrorists outside the West?

We are well aware that “belonging” is a complex term. People might live in a Western country for years but still not feel as though they belong. Hence, current research deals with issues of “multiple belonging” and suggests that individuals might belong to several geographical or imagined communities at a time.¹⁸ Similarly, identities can be transnational and are not necessarily about “roots” but also “routes” and trajectories.¹⁹ Nonetheless, at the very core of the homegrown debate was the question of whether contemporary terrorists were born and raised in the West; not whether they *felt* that they belonged in the West. In the present article, we remain within the terms of this debate and therefore attempt to define some criteria to indicate

¹⁸ Maja Povrzanović Frykman, “Challenges of Belonging in Diaspora and Exile: An Introduction,” in *Beyond Integration: Challenges of Belonging in Diaspora and Exile*, ed. Maja Povrzanović Frykman (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2001), Nauja Kleist, “Ambivalent Encounters. Negotiating Boundaries of Danishness, Somaliness, and Belonging,” in *From Mogadishu to Dixon*, ed. Abdi M. Kusow and Stephanie R. Björk (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 2007).

¹⁹ Liisa Malkki, “National Geographic: The Rootings of People and Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees,” *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1992).

Figure 1. Belonging and autonomy as ideal types



the objective degree of belonging. Hence, we do not adopt the agency perspective, delving into whether the individual has a *sense* of belonging to the West or a *sense* of multiple belonging.

Internal autonomous terrorism is the epitome of the discussion in this article—and what was originally thought to be the case with the London bombings. It is an autonomous individual or group, self-started, self-trained, and self-radicalized with a high degree of belonging to the West. An example of one such group is the so-called Hofstadt group, including Mohammed Bouyeri, who killed Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh. Internal autonomous terrorism is the ultimate domestication of terrorism in the sense that the dynamics leading to a plot are found exclusively within the Western country.

Internal affiliated are also homegrown, but they have some sort of affiliation to organized terrorism either as members or more limited contact, such as economic or ideological sup-

port or training. An example of this could be British-born Richard Reid, “the shoe bomber,” who was an al-Qaeda member, or as an example of a more limited affiliation, the London bombers, Mohammad Sidique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer, who went to Pakistan in 2004-05, where they allegedly had contact with Pakistan-based terrorist groups.

External autonomous terrorism is perpetrated by individuals or groups who are independent of terrorists outside the West and feel a low degree of belonging to the West. They form a group, plan, prepare for, and (if not stopped) carry out a terrorist attack in the West. An example could be the two young Lebanese students, who in 2006—one year after their arrival—apparently at their own initiative, attempted two train bombings in Germany to protest against the Mohammed caricatures.

External affiliated terrorism mirrors internal affiliated terrorism except for the lower degree of belonging to the West. The 2004 Madrid attack is an example of external af-

filiated terrorism. The plot was self-started by and around 36-year-old Abd al-Majid al-Fakhet al-Tunisi, who arrived from Tunisia at age 24. The co-conspirators came from a number of different countries, and there were several links to different Jihadi environments in North Africa and the Middle East, but the plot was planned and prepared by individuals situated in Spain. The plot aptly illustrates the importance of access to other Jihadi environments, but still having the dynamic inside the country. Another example with a more direct link to transnational Jihadism could be the German Tawhid cell, disrupted in Hamburg in 2002. The Tawhid cell was organized around Abu Dhess, who had direct contact to Abu Musab al Zarqawi, who allegedly also took direct part in assigning members to the group.

The clear forms of belonging and autonomy are easily recognized: the London bombers, who were born and raised in the UK, obviously belonged, whereas the recently arrived Yemenites who participated in the 9/11 hijacking obviously did not; similarly, Richard Reid was not autonomous, whereas Theo van Gogh's murderer was. However, many cases are more difficult to categorize. In such cases, we have assigned four objective indicators based on the literature review above.

Place of birth, is closely associated with belonging, which is therefore one of our four indicators. Genkin and Gutfraind²⁰ emphasize *citizenship*, which is the second indicator. Precht²¹ uses the *formative years* as criterion. This criterion is in line with Inglehart,²² who

claims that values and worldviews are largely based on experiences in "the formative years" (from 13-19). Our third indicator therefore covers individuals who have spent more than half of their formative years in the West, i.e. arrived before age 16. The fourth indicator is the most permissive way of understanding homegrown terrorism; or to completely rule it out by discriminating between individuals who have been in the West for *more or less than five years*.

As for *autonomy*, it is by definition ruled out by *international organizational attachment*, which is the first indicator. However, it is not always easy to determine whether such attachment exists. The other three indicators therefore attempt to find clues for this. *Jihad abroad*, *training abroad* and *travel to a conflict zone* are all indicators of some degree of dependence on transnational Jihadism, the latter being the weakest.

In the next section, we present an empirical analysis of belonging and autonomy using these eight indicators. It would be possible to create a formative index: if a case is scored as having two or three of the four indicators in either of the categories, we consider it internal or autonomous. However, the data is not very complex, so the loss of data is not worth it. Instead, either of the indicators can be used as a proxy for how internal or autonomous a case is.

A QUANTITATIVE MEASURE OF BELONGING AND AUTONOMY

Clarifying the concept of homegrown terrorism still leaves the original question pressing: has anything really changed? Has terrorism in the West become more homegrown or more autonomous? To answer these questions, we have created a dataset of

²⁰ Genkin and Gutfraind, "How Do Terrorist Cells Self-Assemble? Insights from an Agent-Based Model".

²¹ Precht, "Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalisation in Europe - from Conversion to Terrorism".

²² Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 157.

Islamist terrorist incidents and individuals involved in Islamist terrorism in the period 1989-2008. The plots and individuals are measured on the four indicators of belonging and four indicators of autonomy presented above. Since 2001, only four Islamist terrorist attacks have been perpetrated in the West: The 2004 Madrid bombing, the 2004 assassination of Theo van Gogh, the 2005 London bombing, and the 2007 suicide attack in Glasgow Airport (the latter hurting only the terrorists). Since foiled and failed plots include valuable information about the dynamics of terrorism, they have been included in the quantitative study.²³

Islamist terrorism is defined as terrorism legitimized by Islamist ideology. *Terrorism* is reserved to cases involving personal injury, attempted personal injury, or immediate risk of personal injury. The reason for doing so is partly pragmatic, since cases of vandalism without personal injury are not recorded as systematically as cases involving personal injury, and partly substantial, as there is a qualitative difference between damaging property and killing people. This distinction concurs with Wilkinson's definition of terrorism as "the creation of a climate of extreme fear."²⁴ By using this definition, we exclude a number of cases of political vandalism counted in most datasets of terrorism, including the arson attacks on diplomatic vehicles in Sweden in 2005 and 2006 in protest against the Iraq

²³ Foiled and failed plots include planning and attempts of terrorism that did not result in a terrorism act. We thus exclude cases tried under terrorism laws such as inciting to hatred, possession of terrorist manual etc. The foiled and failed plots included in this study have generally been successfully prosecuted in court. However, a few cases in which nobody was convicted but where the physical evidence suggests a failed plot, i.e. an unexploded bomb, have also been included.

²⁴ Paul Wilkinson, "International Terrorism: New Risks to World Order," in *Dilemmas of World Politics: International Issues in a Changing World*, ed. J. Baylis and N. Rengger (London: Clarendon Press, 1992), 279.

war,²⁵ which are included in the Global Terrorism Database statistics (GTD).²⁶ Here, *Islamism* is used in a very broad sense of political Islam, i.e. the struggle to use Sharia Law in civil and criminal law in society and the rejection of democracy.²⁷ The method suggested by Petter Nesser for classifying terrorist attacks as Islamist or not is followed. Four criteria are used for assessment: 1. the militants' justification of their attack, 2. target selection, 3. general context, and 4. the background of the militants.²⁸ In many cases, this information is not individually conclusive or even available. To categorize something as Islamist, more indicators should point in that direction than in the opposite; for example, the assassination of two Muslim clerics in Brussels in 1989 following their criticism of Khomeini's death sentence on Salman Rushdie is here regarded as Islamist even though it has never been fully solved.

²⁵ A number of debates about the definition of terrorism concern the target: military, government, civilian. This distinction is mostly relevant for distinguishing between terrorism and guerilla warfare in areas with ongoing or latent civil war. No distinctions between different targets are made in this study. Another definitional debate pertains to the motives, typically in order to be able to distinguish between criminal activities and terrorism. In this study, this distinction is dealt with in the assessment of Islamism: If a murder is committed to further an Islamist cause, it is regarded Islamist terrorism. For a more in-depth discussion, see Magnus Ranstorp, "Introduction: Mapping Terrorism Research - Challenges and Priorities," in *Mapping Terrorism Research - State of the Art, Gaps and Future Direction*, ed. Magnus Ranstorp (Stockholm: Swedish National Defence College, 2006), Gérard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin, eds., *The History of Terrorism - from Antiquity to Al-Qaida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), Wilkinson, "International Terrorism: New Risks to World Order," in J. Baylis and N. Rengger (eds.) *Dilemmas of World Politics: International Issues in a Changing World* (London: Clarendon Press, 1992) 228-57.

²⁶ Global Terrorism Database, "Global Terrorism Database 1 & 2," National Consortium for the Study of and Responses to Terrorism, <http://www.start.umd.edu/data/gtd/>.

²⁷ Dietrich Jung, "Islam and Politics: A Fixed Relationship?," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 16, no. 1 (2007): 31.

²⁸ Petter Nesser, "Jihad in Europe - a Survey of the Motivations for Sunni Islamist Terrorism in Post-Millennium Europe," in *FFI/Rapport* (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2004).

The four indicators of belonging are found in the left side of Table 1: *citizenship, place of birth, less than five years in the country, and formative years abroad.* The four indicators of autonomy are found in the right side of Table 1: *travel to conflict zone, training abroad, jihad abroad, and international organizational attachment.* All of the indicators are formulated in such a manner that the higher the percentage, the fewer

belong. The information on training is often inconclusive. The criterion used here is that if there is more evidence indicating that a person has been trained than the opposite, the person is coded as trained. If a person's history is described well and there is no information on training, the person is coded as untrained—if the information is limited, the category is coded as “missing.” The same

Table 1. Empirical findings, belonging and autonomy from 1993-2008

		No citizenship	Born abroad	Less than 5 years in West	Formative years abroad (0-16)	Travel to conflict zone	Training abroad	Jihad abroad	Int. org. attachment	
Individual	1993-1996	16 (32) 50.0%	24 (32) 75%	4 (14) 28.6%	8 (14) 57.1%	21 (24) 87.5%	15 (19) 78.9%	12 (18) 66.7%	32 (32) 100%	N=32
	1997-2003	45 (67) 67.2%	53 (66) 80.3%	18 (42) 42.9%	30 (41) 73.2%	50 (53) 94.3%	54 (55) 98.2%	11 (47) 23.4%	54 (54) 100%	N=73
	2004-2008	47 (106) 44.3%	60 (106) 56.6%	3 (75) 4%	12 (75) 16%	33 (98) 33.7%	20 (99) 20.2%	4 (99) 4%	28 (100) 28.0%	N=123
	1993-2008	108 (205) 52.7%	137 (204) 67.2%	25 (131) 19.1%	50 (130) 38.5%	104 (175) 59.4%	89 (173) 51.4%	27 (164) 16.5%	114 (186) 61.3%	N=228
Plot	1993-1996	12 (13) 92.3%	13 (13) 100%	2 (5) 40%	3 (5) 60%	13 (13) 100.0%	12 (12) 100%	10 (10) 100.0%	13 (13) 100%	N=13
	1997-2003	12 (17) 70.6%	14 (17) 82.4%	3 (12) 25%	6 (12) 50%	14 (14) 100.0%	14 (14) 100%	5 (13) 38.5%	15 (15) 100%	N=17
	2004-2008	18 (33) 54.5%	24 (33) 72.7%	3 (32) 9.4%	8 (31) 25.8%	17 (31) 54.8%	11 (30) 36.7%	3 (30) 10.0%	9 (31) 29.0%	N=35
	1993-2008	42 (63) 66.7%	51 (63) 81%	8 (49) 16.3%	17 (48) 35.4%	44 (58) 75.9%	37 (56) 66.1%	18 (53) 34.0%	37 (59) 62.7%	N=65

criteria apply to *jihad abroad* and *international organizational attachment*.²⁹

Like Genkin and Gutfraind, we consider that the composition of groups should be taken into account.³⁰ Table 1 therefore consists of two datasets: one dataset with the information on *individuals*, listed at the top of Table 1, the other dataset at the bottom of Table 1, where the individual data has been combined in *plots*. However, in contrast to Genkin and Gutfraind, who argue that a plot is homegrown if most of the participants are homegrown, we categorize a plot as “trained abroad” if one of the persons in the plot has been trained abroad. The argument here is that if one person has established international contacts, the plot as such cannot be considered autonomous; and if one person in a plot does not belong, the plot as a whole does not belong.

The three periods (1993-96/1997-2003/2004-08) have been constructed by the values on the dependent variable. Since we have no data for the individuals involved in the plots from 1989 to 1992, this period is discarded. The first period, 1993-96, primarily consists of the French cases linked to the civil war in Algeria. The period from 1996-2008 is divided into two periods in order to test the hypothesized change after the

London bombing. That the split is after 2003 rather than 2004 is based on an examination of the values in the quantitative material. The plots from 1997-2003 resemble one another, as do the plots from 2004-08.

Belonging and autonomy

On the basis of these considerations, we are now able to deal with the main question as to whether there has actually been an increase in homegrown terrorism or whether terrorism in the West has become increasingly internal and autonomous.

In terms of *belonging*, there is a clear tendency observed in relation to all four indicators that terrorism in the West has become increasingly internal after 2003. However, most of the current terrorists were born abroad, and roughly half do not hold Western citizenship. Nonetheless, a massive majority (85%) has grown up in the West and spent their formative years here, and 95% has been here for more than five years. Hence, only a minority of today’s terrorists belong in the strongest sense (being born in the West), but a huge majority belongs in the somewhat weaker sense of being raised here or having spent more than five years in the West.

Scrutinizing the details more closely, we see an increase in the indicators of “belonging” over the entire period from 1993-2008. At the individual level, this is not a linear evolution according to which terrorism becomes increasingly more homegrown, but rather a rollercoaster-like evolution. Individuals involved in terrorist plots in the first period (1993-96) present a higher degree of belonging on all four indicators than in the following period (1997-2004). To take just one example, the percentage of terrorists born abroad, increases from 75% in the first period to 80% in the second, only to drop to 57% after 2003.

²⁹ Data has been collected from immediately available sources. Thousands of documents, government reports, academic books, articles, and newspaper archives such as Lexis Nexis have been accessed. Primary sources such as court transcripts have only been accessed in a few cases and there have been no interviews. This is primarily a pragmatic decision based on time and resources. 80 attacks and plots have been identified. We were able to find information on 260 individuals in 68 plots, resulting in an average of 3.8 identified conspirators per plot. Of 260 individuals, 32 were in more than one plot, leaving 228 unique individuals. For the statistics on individual terrorists, each terrorist appears only once. For data on age etc., they appear with their first known plot or attack. All of the data can be found on the author’s webpages.

³⁰ Genkin and Gutfraind, “How Do Terrorist Cells Self-Assemble? Insights from an Agent-Based Model”.

At the plot-level, however, the rise in internal terrorism increases steadily in the 1993-2008 period, as observed in relation to all four indicators. The difference between the individual and plot levels can largely be explained by the French cases in the mid-1990s, when many of those involved—mostly French-Algerians—presented internal features (birth, citizenship, formative years, more than five years in country). In most of these plots, however, at least one of the involved was a newly arrived Algerian.

The general hypothesis regarding an increase in internal terrorism is thus confirmed. Nonetheless, despite an undisputable rise in belonging, an assessment in absolute numbers reveals that—in the most recent period—the majority is still born outside the West (57%), and less than half (45%) holds Western citizenship. The degree of belonging is even lower at the plot level, since 73% of the plots after 2003 have involved at least one person born abroad. However, if we adopt weaker criteria of belonging (“more than five years in country” or “formative years”), a massive majority belongs (96% and 84%, respectively).³¹ Both of these indicators present a drastic rise in belonging after 2003 at the individual and plot levels.

In terms of *autonomy*, there is a similar tendency that terrorism in the West has become increasingly autonomous. The change is clearest at the plot level. We consider that the plot level is the most significant, since it only takes one person in a group with international contacts to ensure that the whole group has such contact or to ensure some operational upgrade in the form of training, technical skills, security awareness, etc. In the first period (1993-

96), 100% of the plots are affiliated according to all four indicators (conflict zone, training, jihad, international organization). This is still the case in the second period, except for the indicator “jihad abroad” (which drops to 39%). The situation changes distinctly after 2003. “Training abroad” drops from 100% to 37%, and “international organizational attachment” drops from 100% to 30%.

Despite a clear tendency towards increased autonomy, most of the plots today (55%) still have a transnational dimension, since at least one person involved has travelled to a conflict zone. In 37% of the plots, at least one person has received training abroad, and in one-third of the plots (29%), the group has had contact to an international organization.

The quantitative analysis shows that terrorism in the West has become markedly more internal since 2003 in the sense that a larger proportion of the individuals involved in terrorism belong in the West and at the same time are more independent of organized terrorist networks abroad. Increased autonomy is a new phenomenon. However, it is still a minority that belongs in the strongest sense of being born in the West (43%). Most of those involved in terrorist plots belong, but in the weaker sense of having spent “more than five years” or their “formative years” in the West. One could argue that a distinctive feature of this group is that, with a low degree of belonging, they are situated somewhere *between* belonging and non-belonging. This is even more significant at the plot level, since only 27% of the plots are homegrown in the strictest sense, i.e. that *all* of those involved are born in the West. Hence, despite the increase in internal and autonomous terrorism, it is a myth that terrorism is currently carried out by homogeneous groups in which all of the members are born and raised in the West. The qualitative study below shows that

³¹ Note that the variables are more vulnerable to random variation, as N is lower, which is because more information is required: year of birth and year of arrival in the West.

the groups are in fact very heterogeneous in terms of belonging. People with a high degree of belonging apparently mix with others with a lower degree of belonging. Conversely, the data show that “externals” who do not belong at all are more or less absent from current terrorism in the West.

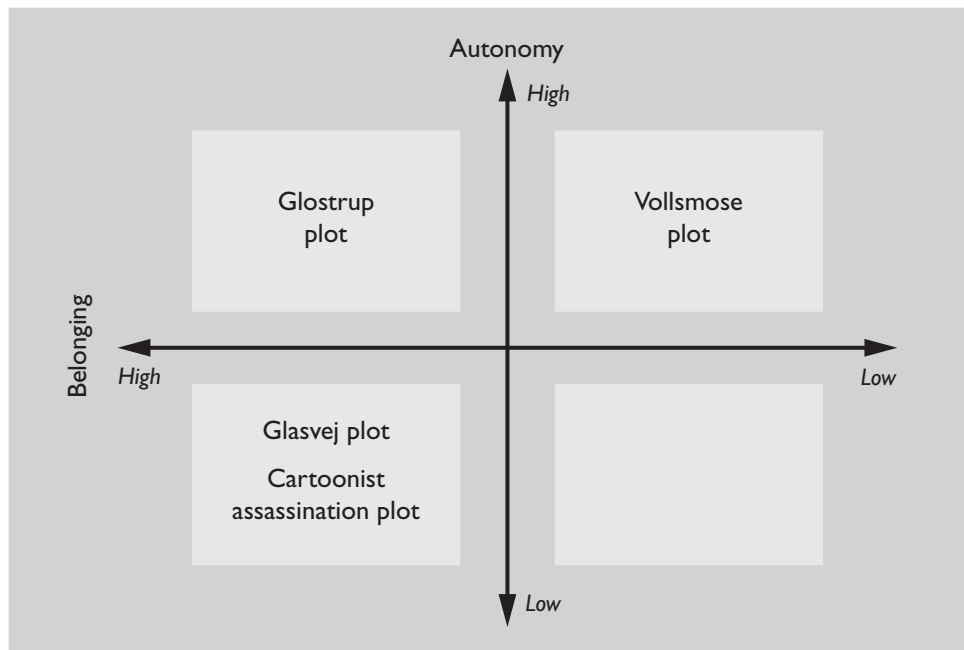
THE DANISH CASES

Terrorist cases are more complicated than what can be shown using eight quantitative indicators. We therefore explore the dimension of belonging and autonomy in relation to four qualitative cases. The Danish authorities have successfully prosecuted three cases of planned terrorism from 2005, 2006, and 2007, and on January 1, 2010, there was an attempt to assassinate one of the twelve Danish cartoonists who drew the Prophet in 2005. In the following, we will explore the two dimensions using these four cases.

The cartoonist assassination attempt

The most recent Danish case has yet to be tried in court. A number of aspects therefore remain uncertain. We choose to include it, because the alleged would-be assassin (MMG) on January 1, 2010, admittedly forced his way into the house of the cartoonist using an axe. He has subsequently been charged under the Danish Terrorism Act. We consider it a case of *internal affiliated* terrorism, but the degree of belonging is low for the category. MMG, 28 years old at the time of the arrest, was neither born nor had citizenship in a Western country, but arrived in Denmark in 1997 at age 15. He thus belongs in the sense that he has spent more than five years, including most of his formative years, in a Western country. He allegedly had contacts with al-Shabaab in Somalia and, according to Kenyan authorities, with al-Qaeda-affiliated individuals in Nairobi.

Figure 2. Belonging and autonomy in Danish cases



According to Swedish media, MMG had collected funds in Gothenburg, Sweden, together with Abdi Rahman Mohammed, a Danish Somali, fingered as the suicide bomber who killed twenty-four people in December 2009—including ministers from the transitional government—at a graduation ceremony of medical professionals in Mogadishu.

The press reports provide different accounts of MMG's travel activity to Somalia and East Africa. It is known that MMG was arrested in Kenya in 2009; officially for a formality regarding his documents, but according to the Kenyan authorities in connection with a terrorism investigation. According to Kenyan authorities, MMG stayed several months in an apartment in Nairobi during the summer of 2009 in the neighbourhood called "little Mogadishu". It appears as though the apartment was paid by an al-Qaeda-associated individual.³²

The Glasvej case

The second most recent of the Danish cases, the Glasvej case, is also an example of an *internal affiliated* plot. In September 2007, seven men were arrested in Copenhagen, and charges were later raised against two persons, a Dane with Pakistani background and an Afghan living in Denmark. The two were accused of planning and preparing a terror attack at an unknown location. In October 2008, the Danish-Pakistani was sentenced to twelve years and the Afghani to seven years with subsequent expulsion. The high court later upheld the convictions, and the Afghani's sentence was increased to 8 years. The two men were convicted for producing explosives and conspiring to commit

an act of terrorism. In 2007, the Danish-Pakistani had travelled to Pakistan and had apparently been in a training camp in Waziristan, where, according to the security service, he had been in contact with a high-ranking al-Qaeda member before returning to Denmark. Upon his return, he and his Afghan friend began preparing the plot.

We assess that the two convicted in the plot *belong* in Denmark. The Danish-Pakistani was born in Denmark and holds Danish citizenship. His mother took him to Pakistan together with his other siblings when he was one year old while his father remained in Denmark to work. In 2003, at age 18, he joined his father and older brother in Denmark. The Afghani was born in Afghanistan, but his family travelled to Thailand as illegal immigrants when he was two years old. The family was granted political asylum in Denmark when he was eight, and he began attending a Danish school. As such, neither of these two individuals was born *and* raised. However, one of the convicted was born in Denmark and holds Danish citizenship while the other arrived at age eight and thus spent more than five years—including his formative years—in the West.

We assess the autonomy to be very low. The Danish-Pakistani had travelled to Pakistan in 2007, where he first linked up with people at the Red Mosque in Islamabad and later gained access to a training camp in Waziristan. In Waziristan, he allegedly had contact with an al-Qaeda "facilitator." The defense argued that he was on his way to Afghanistan to fight NATO troops, but after staying in Waziristan was sent back to Denmark to purchase night vision equipment; according to the prosecution, he was sent back to carry out an attack. We therefore consider the plot affiliated. The Danish-Pakistani had received training abroad, had linked up with radical

³² Steen Jensen, "Kenyansk Politi: Mmg Mødt Med Al-Qaeda," *Berlingske Tidende*, 11 January 2010.

environments, and had probably been in contact with an established terrorist organization. Moreover, there is no evidence of a plot or a group prior to the trip to Pakistan. The Afghani became involved in the production of explosives only *after* his friend returned from a training camp in Pakistan.

From this, we conclude that the plot can be considered *internal affiliated* but that the degree of belonging is low for the category. One of the convicted men was born in Denmark but had spent most of his formative years outside the West and only arrived four years prior to the plot; the other arrived at age 8, indicating that his formative years were spent in the West. However, starting late in school, having to learn Danish, having experience from another country, and having parents who never learned Danish represents a lower degree of belonging than, for instance, the persons involved in the Glostrup case (see below).

The Vollsmose case

The third of the Danish cases, the Vollsmose case, is an example of *external autonomous* terrorism. Nine individuals were arrested in September 2006. Four were tried in court; one was acquitted; three were convicted and sentenced to five, twelve and twelve years, respectively, for conspiring to commit an act of terrorism at an unspecified location, probably in Denmark. The highly unstable, homemade explosive, TATP—which is often used to detonate more stable homemade explosives—was found in the home of one of the convicted men. The police reacted on information from a civilian agent, who had provided the persons involved in the plot with, among other things, fertilizer with a high content of ammonium nitrate, instrumental in the production of a so-called fertilizer bomb. Seven months prior to the plot, one of those convicted had an-

nounced in an Internet chat-forum that he intended to kill one of the cartoonists behind the Mohammed cartoon crisis.

The belonging of the participants in the Vollsmose plot is ambiguous. One of the three convicted was a Danish convert; the other two persons involved came from Syria and Iraq. The Syrian, aged thirty-three, had been united with his wife in Denmark at age twenty-five and held Danish citizenship. The Iraqi Kurd, twenty-one years old, did not hold Danish citizenship but had been in the country for six years since age fifteen. The categorization of the Vollsmose plot as external rather than internal is due to the only “belonging” category that all of those convicted lived up to was *in country more than five years*. The Syrian, who, according to the prosecutor, led the plot, did not spend his formative years in Denmark. He arrived at age 25 and even though he had been in the country for eight years, he needed a translator during the trial. The Iraqi, labelled the *right-hand man* by the prosecution, had spent most of his formative years in Denmark but had only been there for six years in total; he was neither born in Denmark nor did he hold Danish citizenship. The third person involved was a Danish convert but was merely convicted for a minor role in the plot.

The autonomy of the Vollsmose plot is clearer than the belonging. The young Iraqi Kurd only had contact with likeminded in chat forums, and he travelled to Iraq in 2005, allegedly to film a documentary. Before coming to Denmark, the Syrian had been in contact with PFLP. The instructions for constructing bombs were found on the Internet. No evidence has been presented to support the Vollsmose plot being affiliated with transnational terrorists. It has been suggested that the visit to Iraq in 2005 was in fact to join jihad in Iraq but that al-Qaeda sent the Iraqi Kurd

back to carry out attacks in the West; however, there is no evidence supporting this. If the claim had been substantiated by evidence, the plot would have been characterized as *affiliated*. As this is not the case, we characterize the plot as *external autonomous*.

The Glostrup case

The fourth of the Danish cases, the Glostrup case, is an example of an *internal autonomous* plot. Two men, a Swedish citizen with Bosnian background and a Turkish citizen born and raised in Denmark, were arrested in Sarajevo in October 2005 in possession of explosives. They were later convicted of planning a terrorist attack somewhere in Europe. One week later, five men were arrested in the Copenhagen area, four of whom were charged with planning a terrorist attack. Three men were Danish citizens with Syrian, Moroccan and Palestinian backgrounds; one is a Bosnian citizen. In 2006, the Danish citizen with a Palestinian background was sentenced to seven years prison; the others were acquitted. The sentences and acquittals were later upheld in the high court. The Danish group had connections in Sweden and the UK and was extremely well connected via the Internet (to groups in the UK and the U.S.), but had no real-life connections outside the West.

All those involved in the Glostrup case *belong* in the West. The Turkish citizen convicted in Bosnia and the Danish citizens were all born and raised in Denmark. The Bosnian citizen arrived in Denmark with his family as an 8-year-old boy in 1993. The Swedish citizen convicted in Bosnia was born in Montenegro in 1987 but came to Sweden in 1992 at age five.

In terms of autonomy, the people who were actually convicted in the two trials

had no real-life contacts outside the West. In 2004, two of the Danish citizens in the group travelled to the UK, where they met with Omar Bakri. One of the Danes later met the Swedish citizen in a chat forum, and the Swedish-Bosnian paid two visits to Denmark after this virtual meeting. The two persons arrested in Sarajevo had links to two Bosnians, who provided explosives. All of these real-life transnational connections are contacts *within* Europe. Moreover, the case attracted considerable attention due to the extensive international ramifications via the Internet. In particular, the group was linked up with the infamous Irhabi007—al-Qaeda's Webmaster—who later turned out to be a certain Younis Tsouli, a student in London. The group also had connections in the U.S. Nonetheless, these connections remain internal Western contacts and merely virtual. The Danish citizen with a Syrian background travelled to Syria in 2004 and was briefly in Turkey the same year but later acquitted, and there is no information of the nature of these visits.

Shared characteristics and differences in the Danish plots

The three cases that have been tried in Danish courts present a plethora of details regarding the individuals involved: convicted, acquitted as well as a number of individuals who were not tried but were part of the same milieu. Strikingly, the three cases are interlinked—the Glasvej and Glostrup plots in particular included people from the same environment. All three cases—and probably the cartoonist assassination case as well—grew out of a counterculture, marginal to both ordinary Danish society and mainstream Muslim society. Nonetheless, the persons involved were still part of Dan-

ish society through work and schooling. In terms of belonging, it is a very heterogeneous milieu; Danish converts and persons born in Denmark mix with people who have merely been raised or have spent more than five years in the country. Apart from one of those convicted—who was born in Denmark but grew up in Pakistan—all of the accused had arrived in Denmark no later than five years prior to the plot. Hence, it is an environment composed exclusively of people who belong, though to varying degrees. Complete newcomers who had just arrived from abroad are more or less absent. Apparently, one cannot become part of Danish society overnight, let alone a milieu supportive of extremist violence.

The heterogeneity of such an environment in terms of belonging underlines that belonging is not an absolute category, but rather a continuum. Autonomy is also situated on a continuum, but nevertheless presents a clearer distinction; if one person in a group has had contacts abroad, the entire group is considered affiliated. The Vollsmose and Glostrup plots represent rare cases of autonomy in which there have been no real-life contacts to organized terrorist groups outside the West. This is unique to the period after 2003. But it is worth noticing that the two plots in question were the first plots in the period 2004-08. After 9/11, there was a massive clampdown on organized militants in the Pankisi Gorge, in Pakistan, in Saudi Arabia, in Chechnya, etc. For a short while, there were therefore no obvious places to join global jihad and get in contact with organized terrorist groups abroad. The subsequent plots (Glasvej and the cartoonist assassination plot) were affiliated, since there were once again contacts to militant environments abroad (which were unsurprisingly located in Pakistan and Somalia).

CONCLUSION

This article dealt with the question of whether Islamist terrorism around the time of the London bombings had transformed into something completely new and different, often referred to as “homegrown terrorism.” The article found that, since 2003, Islamist terrorism in the West has become increasingly homegrown. The “homegrown” concept was ambiguous, however, and we therefore introduced a distinction between two dimensions of homegrown terrorism: “belonging” and “autonomy.” Belonging deals with the level of attachment to the West, and autonomy deals with independence from terrorist environments outside the West. From these two dimensions, we constructed four ideal types of terrorism: internal autonomous, internal affiliated, external autonomous, and external affiliated. The last type is not homegrown at all, whereas the other types have high autonomy, high belonging, or both.

The article concludes that a general increase in homegrown terrorism could be described more accurately as a rise in internal as well as autonomous terrorism. The increase in autonomy is particularly notable. In previous periods, 100% of the plots were somewhat connected to Islamist militants outside the West. The change in autonomy is thus much more significant than the increase in belonging displayed by the actors in the plots since 2003. However, it makes intuitive sense that the two dimensions are connected; increased autonomy would usually go hand-in-hand with a stronger degree of belonging, whereas the opposite is not necessarily the case, since internal terrorism could easily be affiliated.

The next question is whether it makes a difference if terrorists are autonomous or not. The intuitive answer would be that affiliation to terrorist environments outside the West—

presumably with more first-hand experience of weapons and explosives—implies an operational upgrade. It cannot, however, be taken for granted that there is an inverse relationship between autonomy and the chance of success, since most attacks fail whether autonomous or not. Complete autonomy probably limits the level of sophistication a plot can achieve; for instance, methods for evading security measures in airports, as in the attempted plot to bomb a plane for Detroit on Christmas Day 2009. In this affiliated plot, the terrorist had high explosives sewn into his underwear. Most of those affiliated still pursue plans that are no more sophisticated than those carried out by autonomous terrorists. Our case studies included two affiliated plots, one about the production of TATP (Glasveje), the other an assassination attempt with an axe. The reason is probably that being somewhat affiliated to Islamist militants outside the West is not the same as being directed by an international terrorist mastermind or being a highly skilled terrorist comparable to the seasoned operatives of Hezbollah, IRA, or al-Qaeda before 2001.

We rarely see the affiliation to Islamist militants outside the West as part of a long-term plan for the acquisition of capabilities to carry out a spectacular attack upon return to the home country. Nor do we see distant terrorist masterminds recruiting terrorists in the West in order to train them abroad and send them back as remote-controlled weapons. What we see is more likely that “internals” are on the lookout for access to militant environments abroad, be they in Pakistan, Yemen, Chechnya, or Somalia. For many, it seems an integral part of embracing Islamist militancy and as such an end rather than a means to something else.

There are thus two possible explanations—that are not mutually exclusive—of why we

did not see autonomous plots prior to 2004. First, the obstacles to becoming a terrorist could have been so great that association to organized Islamist militants was a condition; or secondly, it may have been considered a more easily available option, and thus a more obvious choice, to join the struggle of Islamist militants somewhere abroad than to form one’s own terrorist cell. If the latter is the case, the crude conclusion is that individuals became autonomous terrorists in their home countries, because, for a short while, it was very difficult to join Islamist militants outside the West. If the former is the case, it suddenly became easier to be a terrorist in the West, possibly because of the power of examples, the high profile of al-Qaeda, and the outrage over the war in Afghanistan and more prominently the war in Iraq. In either case, the shift towards autonomous terrorism testifies to the adaptability and resilience of Islamist militancy in the West.

Homegrown terrorism has previously been framed as a distinction between transnational dynamics or domestic dynamics. In other words, is terrorism in Britain the result of geopolitics in Central Asia or racist attacks in the London Underground? The quantitative material in this article makes it very clear that Islamist militancy outside the West has been critical to the terrorist plots prior to 2004, but also to most of the plots ever since. We therefore suggest that the sudden appearance of “homegrown terrorism” could more precisely be conceptualized as an evolution from “external affiliated” to “internal affiliated”—with a short interval marked by “internal autonomous” terrorism.

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