

EXPLAINING AUSTRALIA-LEBANON JIHADIST CONNECTIONS

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Introduction

Like many societies, Australia faces the threat of political violence from a movement commonly termed jihadism, an extremist and highly politicised variant of the Islamic faith. Unique among Western countries, individuals involved in jihadism in Australia have predominantly been of Lebanese descent, and several Australians have been arrested in Lebanon for alleged jihadist activity. While the activities of at most a few dozen people do not reflect on the roughly 70,000 Lebanese-descendent Muslims in Australia, they do highlight a phenomenon that has not been explored, or even noted as unusual, in current research on jihadist militancy.

To make sense of these Australia-Lebanon jihadist connections, this paper examines potential explanations derived from terrorism studies literature, in particular the segment of the literature that focuses on *radicalisation* (how people become involved). These explanations are tested against an extensive body of information gathered by the author through open sources. For the individuals prosecuted in Australia, all relevant publicly available court documents were gathered and supplemented with media reports where necessary. Less information was available on Australians arrested in Lebanon; the author had to depend mainly on media reports. In addition, the judicial process they faced had lower evidentiary standards and there are credible claims of human rights abuses. Consequently this paper focuses primarily on the Australian dimension, where more reliable information was available.

Nature of the Australia-Lebanon jihadist connections

The 2010 Commonwealth Government Counter-Terrorism White Paper emphasised the threat posed to Australia by a broad movement consisting of Al Qaeda, groups allied or associated with it, and individuals inspired by it (Commonwealth Government, 2010: 8). For the purpose of this paper 'jihadism' refers specifically to this broad Al-Qaeda aligned and inspired movement. It does not refer to Lebanon's most well known radical Islamist group, Hezbollah. As a Shia and primarily nationalist movement, Hezbollah represents a thoroughly

distinct phenomenon from the Sunni extremist, globally focused, movement that constitutes Al Qaeda, its affiliates and supporters (Saab and Ranstorp, 2007: 846-848).

In Australia, there is legitimate scepticism regarding the domestic terrorism threat posed by the jihadist movement, given the lack of successful terrorist attacks and events like the Mohammed Haneef debacle. However, 33 people have been prosecuted in Australian courts over alleged terrorism offences motivated by jihadist ideology, the majority of which were convicted, demonstrating the reality of the threat.

Important here is that 20 of these 33 have been of Lebanese descent. This includes the majority of those charged with involvement in terrorist plots on Australian soil, and half of those charged with terrorism offences not related to a specific plot. It might be supposed that there is simply a large number of Australian Muslims of Lebanese descent, and consequently the few Australians getting involved in jihadist activity are statistically more like to have Lebanese backgrounds. Yet while Lebanese-Australian Muslims make up 60% of those charged over alleged jihadist activity, they constitute only 20% of all Australian Muslims. (ABS, 2006).

Moreover, Europe and the United States, despite having Lebanese-descendant communities many times larger than Australia's (Information International, 2001: 4-5), almost never experience jihadism-related terrorism attempts by members of these communities. A study of all US-based jihadists that could be found through public sources found only two of 175 were of Lebanese origin (Bergen, 2011). A study of 242 jihadists in Europe found only seven with a Lebanese background (Bakker, 2006: 37). That study was published in 2006, yet the Europol Terrorism Situation and Trend Reports, published annually since 2007, make almost no mention of Lebanese terrorism connections in Europe (Europol, 2007-2011). Therefore, the high level of Lebanese-Australian involvement in jihadist activity is disproportionate not just within Australia, but also when compared to other Western countries.

It could be argued that the sample size is too small, as only 33 people have been prosecuted over jihadism-related terrorist activity in Australia, while hundreds have been prosecuted in countries like the US, UK, Italy, Spain and France. Yet evidence for significant Australia-Lebanon jihadist connections exists not only in prosecutions in Australian courts. Since 2001, at least 16 Australians have been arrested in Lebanon over alleged jihadist activity, or charged in absentia by Lebanese authorities. Most of these arrests were for alleged involvement with Lebanese jihadist groups Asbat al-Ansar and Fatah al-Islam. These are Sunni extremist groups that originally emerged from the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, as the Palestine Liberation Organisation's authority declined during the 1990s. In the last ten years they have gained a small Lebanese constituency, explicitly identified with Al Qaeda's global movement and carried out violence against a range of targets (Saab and Ranstorp 2007).

These incidents in both Australia and Lebanon are described in this paper as the "Australia-Lebanon jihadist connections." They are briefly summarised in Table 1 below. The information in this table, and other parts of this paper referring to these individuals (unless

stated otherwise), comes from the author's database of publicly available court records and media reports. Contact the author for specific sources.

Table 1.

<u>Jihadism-related prosecutions in Australia</u>	<u>Involvement of Lebanese-Australians</u>
2002: Discovery of failed Jemaah Islamiyah/Al Qaeda initiated plot.	0 of 1 charged.
2003: Laskar e-Toiba linked plot.	0 of 1 charged.
2005: Operation Pendennis – plots in Melbourne and Sydney.	16 of 22 charged. 12 of 18 convicted.
2009: Operation Neath – plot against Holsworthy Barracks.	2 of 5 charged. 2 of 3 convicted.
2003-2005: Miscellaneous jihadism-related charges.	2 of 4 charged. 2 of 3 convicted.
Overall:	20 of 33 charged. (60%) 16 of 26 convicted. (55%)
<u>Australians suspected of jihadist activity in Lebanon</u>	<u>Alleged activity</u>
2003-2004: 6 Australians arrested or charged in absentia for alleged involvement with Asbat al-Ansar. 5 convicted (2 in absentia).	Bombings of multiple fast-food restaurants, and training to take part in Iraq insurgency. Much of this occurred around Ein el-Hilweh, a Palestinian refugee camp near southern city of Sidon.
2007: 7 Australians arrested or charged in absentia for alleged involvement with Fatah al-Islam. 2 released, 4 awaiting trial, 1 wanted.	Supporting Fatah al-Islam's unsuccessful confrontation with the Lebanese army in battle of Nahr al-Bared, and storing arms. Occurred in and around the Northern city of Tripoli.
2007, 2010: 3 miscellaneous arrests of Australians over alleged jihadist activity. 1 convicted, 2 released.	One involved with a group in Ein el-Hilweh, possibly on transit to Iraq. Unclear what other two suspected of.
Overall:	At least 16 Australians arrested or charged in absentia over alleged jihadist activity in Lebanon from 2003-2010.

Jihadism and radicalisation literature

Terrorism studies literature offers a useful starting point for explaining Australia-Lebanon jihadist connections. In this literature, explanations for radicalisation use multiple levels of analysis, ranging from structural causes at the global and national level to more direct factors at the group and personal level (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). Macro-level explanations for the spread of jihadism in the West usually begin with Europe during the 1990s, focusing on: the wake of the Soviet-Afghan conflict and other political developments in the greater Middle

East region; the post-Cold War era which created new space for different narratives over the nature of the international order; increased access to global communications technologies; and brutal conflicts in Bosnia and Chechnya which resonated with the jihadist narrative (Taarnby, 2007). Then 9/11 significantly boosted the movement by generating enormous publicity for the cause and in the reaction that followed. Aspects of the US response, particularly the Iraq war, increased support for jihadism and the legitimacy of the West as a target. Within Australia, Muslims were subject to increased media stigmatisation and there were fears anti-terror laws would be used for persecution (Aly, 2008). Such factors could have facilitated further radicalisation.

These factors complement micro-level explanations, which emphasise how radicalisation typically occurs through intense social dynamics amongst tight-knit groups of likeminded individuals, often affiliated with wider transnational radical networks and organisations. These micro-level factors help account for the difference between the large number of people affected by particular social conditions and the far smaller number who radicalise towards terrorism. Such explanations focus on how organisations such as the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and Egyptian Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyah used Europe as place of exile in 1990s, established networks and gained followers (Taarnby, 2007: 169). The jihadist movement held ideological appeal for a small number of Australian Muslims during this time, and connections with radical networks were established, though on a much smaller scale to Europe. The most significant formal network was Mantiqi 4, the Australian branch of Jemaah Islamiyah, one member of which became involved in a planned attack against the Israeli Embassy in Canberra (R v Roche, 2005). There were also smaller, informal networks, which enabled some Australians to train or fight overseas, mainly in Kashmir with Lashkar e-Toiba (LeT) and in Afghanistan with Al Qaeda (Chulov, 2006).

After 9/11 there was the decentralisation of Al Qaeda, encouragement of self-starting cells and increased jihadist use of the internet. This allowed radicalisation to occur among disaffected groups of individuals lacking strong links to organised groups. South East Asia emerged as a jihadist arena, and various jihadist groups in Yemen, Somali, Pakistan and elsewhere aligned with Al Qaeda in attacking the Western 'far enemy' (Bergen and Hoffman, 2010: 5-14). This provided further avenues for involvement for those who could establish a connection.

During this period a greater number of Australians became involved, leading to several planned attacks shown in the Table 1, and the reported increased involvement of Australians in jihadism overseas, not only in Lebanon but also Somalia and Yemen (Caldwell, 2007; Neighbour, 2010). The key question is what may make some Lebanese-Australians more susceptible to these global and local factors than other Australian Muslims? This paper briefly explores micro-level explanations for this phenomenon (which are examined in detail an upcoming article) and then examines potential macro-explanations.

Micro-level explanations

Australia-Lebanon jihadist connections are not directly comparable to other cases of strong diaspora associations with particular jihadist activity in Western countries. For example, there is no public evidence that Lebanese-based jihadist groups made a strategic decision to expand their operational activity to Australia, through their ethnic brethren, such as in the manner that the Algerian GIA brought its violence to France in the 1990s, or the LeT expanded its violence to Western countries post-2001. The traffic has overwhelmingly been one way: Australians have travelled to Lebanon to engage in jihad, not the other way around. In addition, Fatah al-Islam and Asbat al-Ansar have generally restricted their attacks to targets in Lebanon or surrounding countries.

It is also not the case that Lebanon acts as a safe haven for jihadism in Australia, comparable to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, where many terrorists such as the 7/7 London bombers have travelled for training (Cruickshank, 2010). Of the 33 people charged over jihadist activity in Australia, none were alleged to have trained or gained experience in Lebanon, or acted on behalf of anyone there, or been funded by any Lebanese-based group. Nor, with a couple of exceptions, do they appear to have radicalised in Lebanon. These networks within Australia were more likely to have trained with Jemaah Islamiyah, LeT, Al Qaeda and possibly Al-Shabaab than Fatah al-Islam or Asbat Al-Ansar.

None of the Australians who travelled to Lebanon and allegedly became involved with Asbat al-Ansar or Fatah al-Islam are known to have done so to further a terror attack in Australia. Assisting jihad in Lebanon, or gaining assistance to join the jihad in Iraq appears to have been the main motives. If anything, Australia may not be facing a threat emanating from Lebanon, but Lebanon may be facing a jihadist threat from Australia.

So it is unlikely the disproportionate involvement of Lebanese-Australians in jihadist activity has resulted directly from the initiative of Lebanese-based jihadist groups or from Lebanon acting as a safe haven. Another possible explanation is that it is simply chance, amplified by network links. As radicalisation tends to occur through tight-knit groups of likeminded individuals, perhaps the initiators of jihadism in Australia happened to be of Lebanese-descent and had Lebanese-Australian friends.

There is some merit to this explanation, as a few key individuals of Lebanese descent have played a leadership role in some Australian jihadist networks (Chulov, 2006; R v Elomar & Ors, 2010: 81-93, 95, 106). In addition, there are several linkages between the jihadism-related incidents covered in Table 1. One of the people convicted in absentia by Lebanese authorities was also convicted of terrorism offences in Australia, and three of the people arrested in Lebanon were relatives of members of the Sydney Pendennis cell.

Yet this explanation also has shortcomings. Instances of Lebanese-Australians becoming radicalised have not all been tightly clustered together. The Melbourne Pendennis cell, for example, consisted mainly of Lebanese-descendent individuals but radicalised under the leadership of an Algerian-born leader (R v Benbrika & Ors, 2009). Two of the three convicted for Operation Neath were Lebanese-born, but radicalised independently of the people involved in other jihadist plots.

Moreover, there was no significant Lebanese connection to the first incidents of violent jihadism in Australia. The first jihadist terrorism conviction in Australia was of a British immigrant who conspired in 2000 with key Jemaah Islamiyah and Al Qaeda figures (Neighbour, 2004: 181-216). In 2003 Pakistan-born Sydney resident, who had trained with the jihadist group LeT, was arrested and later convicted over conspiring to prepare a terrorist attack (R v Lodhi, 2006). The bulk of Lebanese-Australian jihadist activity did not occur until after these events. Therefore further explanations are needed, making it necessary to examine broader factors.

Long distance nationalism

One potential macro-level explanation for Australia-Lebanon jihadist connections is long-distance nationalism combined with violent politics in the 'homeland'. Benedict Anderson's concept of *long-distance nationalism* refers not to "true émigrés awaiting the circumstances of their triumphal return" but to people "who have no serious intention of going back to a home, which, as time passes, more and more serves as a phantom bedrock for an embattled Metropolitan ethnic identity" (Anderson, 1992: 12). Lebanese-Australians have demonstrated long-distance nationalism to various degrees over time, and as national identity in Lebanon was violently contested during the civil war period of 1975-1990, this manifested itself in intra-community tensions in Australia (Humphrey, 2005: 140).

In a survey conducted at the time, respondents stated that they experienced greater intra-community disharmony in Australia than Lebanon, despite the relative lack of sectarian violence. The survey found extensive "antagonism between the different Lebanese religious sects in Australia" expressed through community newspapers, radio and battles over community leadership (Ata, 1987: 20, 34). These dynamics were heightened by organisations competing over the allocation of settlement assistance and welfare, which was decided on the credibility of their claims to have community support. Sectarian identity was given official recognition by the state, as Australian representatives of Lebanon's 18 official sects were given substantial authority in arranging further migration and approving lists of relatives to settle (Humphrey, 2005: 140).

A range of literature posits long-distance nationalism, resulting in political contestations in the 'homeland' being played out in the host state, as explaining why members of diaspora communities sometimes provide support for armed movements (Anderson, 1992; Demmers, 2002). However, there are several problems with this explanation. First, groups like Fatah al-Islam and Asbat al-Ansar explicitly reject Lebanese nationalism and the sectarian political system in Lebanon (Saab and Ranstorp, 2007). They consequently lack the nationalist appeal of jihadist groups like LeT and al-Shabaab. Nationalist support for political violence typically requires a foreign occupation (real or perceived), which is not evident in Lebanon today. Israel withdrew in 2000, Syria withdrew in 2005 and the United Nations troops in the country are not widely seen as occupiers.

Also, this explanation would not account for Lebanese-descendent individuals engaged in jihadist activity in Australia. There is virtually nothing to suggest events in Lebanon influence the motivation of Australian jihadists convicted of terrorism offences. Jihadists in Australia primarily expressed outrage about Australian troops being in Iraq or Afghanistan, or alleged examples of oppression in Australia, as opposed to Lebanon-specific reasons for engaging in violence (R v Benbrika & Ors, 2009; R v Elomar & Ors, 2010).

Most important, after 1990, “transnational nationalist issues gradually receded from Lebanese community politics” in Australia (Humphrey, 2004: 40). This was partly because of the civil war ending, a new generation being born in Australia, and the passage of time. Consequently, Lebanese-Australians do not necessarily conceive of Lebanon as a ‘homeland.’ (Humphrey, 2005: 139-145) Lebanese-Australians tended to identify far more with ‘homeland’ politics in the 1970s and 1980s, and Lebanese politics was far more violent at the time. Yet there was nothing occurring then comparable to the Australia-Lebanon terrorist connections identified in this paper, rendering this explanation inadequate.

It could be argued that this is simply because the Al Qaeda associated jihadist movement barely existed during Lebanon’s civil war period from 1975 to 1990. But if long-distance nationalism was a significant radicalising factor in Lebanese-Australian communities it would have been manifested in other violent movements at the time, not just jihadism. One empirical study found, counter-intuitively, that there was more transnational terrorist activity during the 1980s than today, due to Cold War sponsorship, the Iranian Revolution and the Israeli-Arab conflict (Goldman, 2010: 55). Much of that transnational terrorism was Lebanon-based. The PLO was headquartered in Lebanon until the 1982 Israeli invasion, and various armed Palestinian factions remained afterwards. Hezbollah, the most significant Iranian-backed group, emerged in the wake of the invasion and was involved in major transnational terror attacks.

Yet few Australia-Lebanon terrorist connections existed during that period. There were bombings in Sydney of the Israeli Consulate and Jewish Hakoah club, causing serious injuries, on 23 December 1982, following Israel’s invasion of Lebanon (Crown, 1986: 34-35). However, the perpetrators were believed to have been “flown in” by the 15 May Organisation (a PLO faction) and not part of a Lebanese-Australian community (Brawley and Shaw, 2009: 239). In 1991 there were two separate incidents, each resulting in the arrest of a Lebanese-Australian male, of alleged attempts at violent action to protest the Gulf War (Small and Gilling, 2010: 248). A 1991 government report identified several Lebanese armed groups as having a local presence, such as the (Maronite Christian) Lebanese Forces, the (Druze) Progressive Socialist Party and the (Shia) Hezbollah, but there is no indication they attempted political violence in Australia (Small and Gilling, 2010: 249-250).

Therefore, during the 1980s Lebanese-Australians identified more closely with sectarian politics in the ‘homeland’; Lebanon was experiencing an extremely violent, inter-sectarian civil war; Lebanon-based terrorism had greater global reach; and Lebanon was partly occupied by Israel. Yet there were few Australia-Lebanon terrorist connections comparable to those seen today. Certainly an indispensable factor is the rise of the global jihadist movement,

providing the ideology and networks for involvement. But we are still short of a compelling reason why Lebanese-Australians were disproportionately likely to become involved.

Disadvantage and marginalisation

Another possibility is that disadvantage and marginalisation served as a structural cause that helped radicalise some Lebanese-Australian Muslims, in combination with micro-level factors. Lebanese-Australians do experience substantial economic disadvantage. They are overrepresented at the bottom end of employment, as “labourers and related” and underrepresented at the top end. The second generation is doing better than the first, and is 50% more likely to be in professional employment, but is still at an employment level significantly lower than the Australian average (Collins 2009: 34).

This economic disadvantage can be partly explained through the means of arrival. Many Lebanese people moved to Australia after 1975, as refugees from the civil war. This coincided with an economic downturn in Australia and a decline in low-skilled manufacturing jobs, which had previously been an essential source of livelihood for many immigrants to Australia. In addition, arriving as a refugee would have been a more difficult transition than for immigrants who voluntarily left their country of origin. The experiences of Lebanese-Australians are similar to those of Vietnamese-Australians, many of whom also arrived as part of a large scale refugee intake from the late 1970s and also face significant economic disadvantage (Betts and Healy, 2006: 28-29).

Among Lebanese-Australians, Muslims are worse off than Christians. Almost half of all Lebanese-Australian Muslim households have no employed members at all while only 20% of Lebanese-Australian Christian households are in this position, though these figures presumably exclude informal employment. The income per household of Lebanese-Australian Muslims is much less than for their Christian counterparts, and is only half the national average (Betts and Healy, 2006: 28-29).

There are several reasons why Lebanese-Australian Muslims are poorer than their Christian counterparts. First, Lebanese Muslims had a lower starting point, as they were already disadvantaged in Lebanon relative to Christians, a legacy of the French colonial system. Second, their immigration was more recent than Lebanese Christian immigration, in large part because they were less likely to be regarded as “white” under the White Australia Policy (Tabar, 2009: 235-236). Third, because of this timing, they were more likely to have been war refugees. The majority of Lebanese Muslim immigration occurred during the civil war, representing all the official Lebanese Muslim sects (Sunni, Shia, Druze and Allawi) (Tabar, 2009: 236). Last, earlier Lebanese Christian settlement meant that Christian refugees had more established family and social networks available to them for support.

This disadvantage experienced by Lebanese-Australian Muslims manifests itself not only in employment but educational achievement (Betts and Healy, 2006: 37). Again, the second generation is better off than the first but it is still a poor situation. 11% of second generation

Sydney based Lebanese Muslims have degrees, compared to 15% for Australia as a whole (Betts and Healy, 2006: 37; Hassan, 2009: 7). So Australian Muslims of Lebanese origin are disadvantaged in both economic and educational terms. They are worse off than other Australian Muslims and other Lebanese-Australians.

Additionally, Lebanese-Australian Muslims have also often been stigmatised and marginalised by sections of the public, media and some politicians. The most identifiable starting point would be a media controversy that broke out in 1998 over “ethnic gangs” in Sydney, particularly Lebanese (Collins et al, 2000: 2-3). The media response implicated the entire Sydney Lebanese community in the activity of criminal gangs and the controversy became part of Premier Bob Carr’s election campaign, resulting in a “zero tolerance” policing approach over the next year. (Kennedy, 2000) The campaign led to increased distrust between Sydney’s Lebanese community and the police, as well as the wider community. Even older Lebanese community members, religious leaders and leaders of community institutions, who had supported the calls for stronger laws and increased police presence, felt alienated by the response (Collins et al, 2000: 7, 199-222).

The media controversy initially focused on Lebanese-Australians in general (who are majority Christian) rather than Lebanese-Australian Muslims specifically. However, the Tampa affair, September 11 and the Bali bombings later led to increased controversies about Muslims which neatly dovetailed with the existing controversies about Lebanese-Australians. When a number of gang rapes were carried out by some Muslims of Lebanese origin in Sydney, public outrage became directed at their entire community (Collins et al, 2004: 116-152). The situation worsened with the Cronulla riots, where a demonstration at Cronulla beach with racist rhetoric led to violence against anyone believed to be Lebanese or Muslim, leading to similarly indiscriminate revenge attacks over the next few days (Nahid Kabir, 2008: 2).

In radicalisation literature, there is widespread (but not universal) support for the notion that disadvantage and marginalisation among Muslims in the West facilitates jihadist radicalisation, because the message – that the West is at war with Islam - is more likely to “resonate with their personal experiences” (Sageman, 2008: 83-84, 89-108). There are several reasons to think this has played a role in jihadist radicalisation among Lebanese-Australian Muslims. People charged and convicted of jihadism related terror offences in Australia have been of a low socio-economic position, lacking high educational status or prestigious jobs (Mullins, 2011: 260-261). They were disproportionately poorly educated compared to other Australian Muslims. In addition, most of this radicalisation occurred post-2001, when Muslims, particularly Lebanese Muslims, became a greater focus of public anxiety in Australia. Furthermore, the majority of Lebanese-Australians involved in jihadist activity were second generation; most were born or had grown up in Australia. This implies that local grievances are important and could be an example of ‘relative deprivation’, a concept developed by Ted Robert Gurr and often used in radicalisation literature (Sinai, 2007: 36). First generation immigrants may expect to struggle in a new society and might compare their economic situation favourably with the one they left. The second generation tends to have

raised expectations and feel more disaffected by both economic disadvantage and marginalisation in Australian society.

Support for the idea of disadvantage and marginalisation combining with the jihadist ideology to act as a radicalising factor can be seen in statements made by some of the prosecuted Lebanese-Australians. One convicted member of the Melbourne Pendennis cell felt that Muslims were discriminated against in Australia, demonstrated by his advocacy efforts to ensure Australian Muslims knew they had the right to pray at work (R v Benbrika & Ors, 2009: 158). He also wrote letter to a newspaper giving his own, arguably self-serving, account of his radicalisation:

Just as Australians were losing faith in the Islamic community, likewise, I was losing faith in Australia's claims of a fair go, having seen and experienced the opposite... Tensions between the Islamic and non-Islamic community were at boiling point, with racism and discrimination rapidly rising (Moor, 2008).

Another member of the same cell, claimed that Australian foreign policy, ASIO and police raids and the media's representation of Muslims were all examples of "oppression" that to him justified violent jihad (ABC, 2005). A third member stated that he felt that Australian society persecuted Muslims, declaring to the magistrate that "you people are the law and you are all non-Muslims... You all work together as one" (Medew, 2006). When one member of the Sydney Pendennis cell was sentenced, Justice Whealy gave the following account of his radicalisation, which shows a range of factors, including marginalisation, coalescing together:

It appears that the events of September 11, 2001 changed things radically for the offender... He himself was abused and called "Osama bin Laden" and a "terrorist" by non-Muslim workers he encountered. At a more abstract level, the offender perceived the threat in terms of all Muslim people being under attack, where the "war against terror", as it was described, was translated by some Muslims into meaning a "war" against all Muslims. This notion, so far as the offender was concerned, was then reinforced by the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. He was an uncritical user of the Internet and other news sources, and this served to reinforce his attitudes concerning the threat and the need for action (R v Touma, 2008: 91).

One problem with this is the near impossibility of disentangling whether an individual radicalises because they perceive themselves as marginalised or if they perceive themselves as marginalised because that is what the radical ideology tells them. There is also no consensus among terrorism researchers on the role of socio-economic factors in radicalisation, beyond a general agreement that absolute poverty does not drive terrorism. Some researchers argue that well-educated and middle class people are in fact more likely to turn to terrorism (Bergin and Townsend, 2007).

Jessica Stern has argued against attempts “to demonstrate the role of socioeconomic factors on terrorism writ large, rather than for particular groups in a particular place under particular conditions at a particular time” (Stern, 2003: 80). If we restrict the focus to jihadist radicalisation among Muslims in the West post-2001, there is considerable evidence that disadvantage contributes (Al-Lami, 2009: 4-5). In addition, studies in the UK, Europe and the US show jihadists as having a similarly low socio-economic profile to Australian jihadists, even in the US where Muslims tend to be well-educated and economically secure (Bakker 2006: 37-40; MPA Workshop, 2010: 30-31; Simcox et al, 2010: 241). Disadvantage and marginalisation present a promising explanation for disproportionate Lebanese-Australian involvement in jihadism, though any single-factor explanation is inadequate.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that there are significant Australia-Lebanon jihadist connections, demonstrated both by Australians being arrested in Lebanon and in the disproportionate level of Lebanese-Australian involvement in jihadism here. This is unique to Australia, as there are few cases of people of Lebanese descent engaging in jihadist activity in other Western countries.

This phenomenon is very different to other cases where there are strong ethno-nationalist associations with particular jihadist activity in Western countries, such as the GIA in France, or Lashkar e-Toiba and Al-Shabaab throughout the West. There is no evidence of the Lebanese jihadist groups Fatah al-Islam and Asbat al-Ansar deciding to target Australia or providing resources, training, or inspiration for attacks in Australia.

There is also little evidence of long-distance nationalism playing a role, despite its utility in helping explaining support for armed movements (jihadist or otherwise) shown by elements of various diaspora communities: Somali, Kurdish, Tamil, Sikh Indian, Croatian, Armenian, Irish Catholic etc. Rather, Lebanese-Australians involved in jihadism were motivated by Al Qaeda’s global message, though particular circumstances gave it greater local resonance.

One explanation that proved useful was the disadvantage and marginalisation of Lebanese-Australian Muslims. This finding is significant because there are ongoing disputes among terrorism scholars over whether disadvantage and marginalisation act as radicalising factors, this paper provides support for the argument that they do. Disadvantage and marginalisation are far from the full story; extremist ideology itself is crucial. Disadvantage among Muslims in the West can act as a radicalising factor precisely because the ideology holds that the West is at war with Islam.

This cannot in itself account for difference between the tens of thousands of Lebanese-Australian Muslims who face similar social circumstances, and the few dozen that appear to have radicalised and joined the jihadist movement. Here the micro-level factors are crucial, as radicalisation typically occurs not randomly but through intense social dynamics amongst tight-knit groups of likeminded individuals. This was evident in the cases examined here.

There was also evidence of Lebanese-Australians playing a leadership role in these networks, and linkages, through family and friends, between several jihadist incidents in both Lebanon and Australia. While social conditions would have increased the susceptibility of some Lebanese-Australian Muslims to the jihadist movement, these micro-factors would increase the likelihood of their involvement, through a snowballing effect.

Australia-Lebanon jihadist connections are an understudied phenomenon and further research is needed. The findings here indicate that Australia-Lebanon jihadist connections are caused by the same mix of global and local factors behind Australian jihadism *in general*, combined with the *particular* social circumstances of Lebanese-Australian Muslims, and the leadership role of a few Lebanese-Australians in several interlinked local radical networks.

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