

## CASIS CONFERENCE REFLECTIONS

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***Disclaimer:*** *This thought piece contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.*

It was my express pleasure to have been able to address the CASIS Conference in Vancouver of 2018. It was forward thinking and placed squarely in context by the quality of other speaks and associates who attended. I was given the privilege of speaking on what I termed, "Terrorism in Islamic Costume: Facing the Counter Terrorism Challenge." I may have used a different variation of the phrasing, but the sentiment was to accurately describe the role between religion (of Islam) and terrorism.

Briefly, my life story is important to mention as to what provides the context of what and how I teach this subject matter. I was radicalized as a teenager and into young adulthood for about 6 years. The 9/11 attacks prompted me to study Islam in more detail and 2 years of study in Syria would cause me to come to abandon my extremist views. Upon return to Canada in 2004, I became what is called a "walk-in" to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. I worked multiple investigations in human networks as well as password protected chat forums. In late 2005, a group I had infiltrated, were committing offences that fell under the mandate of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Integrated National Security Enforcement Team and so I traversed from CSIS to the RCMP as a Police Agent. In June 2006, 18 individuals were arrested, 11 were either convicted or otherwise plead guilty. 7 had charges stayed against them. The prosecution ended in 2010 but I found my life history relevant again with the rise of ISIS in late 2012. I ended up spending 2013-2016 infiltrating their networks, taking screenshots of my interactions with them and arranging analysis of ISIS, thematically and theologically.

The CASIS presentation was a snapshot of these activities. The first part of the instruction relates to the process of radicalization into violence. I

talk about the more well-known models of radicalization by published academics and put myself as a young Muslim growing up in the West, through a simple model of my own. I go one step further and put those individuals arrested in the 2006 case, through that same model and demonstrate how and why they moved into violence, by showing evidence from the court prosecution related to bomb detonators for use in explosive devices.

Secondly, I transition to the period of ISIS activities 2013-2016 by showing actual screenshots of ISIS acolytes that I took personally, and others who have seen been publicly identified members of ISIS recruiting and well as its combatants. Some slides looked at a one-on-one conversation with a young woman who was being groomed to be an ISIS bride and how I was able to intervene and break the chain of recruitment.

The final and most important part of the presentation deals with the Islamic scriptures that castigate and condemn violent extremism. I introduce the Islamic term, “Khawarij” (KHA-WAH-RIJ), religious zealots who were specifically known for 3 things: 1) Quoting the Quran out of its context 2) Hijacking cities and using human shields 3) Indiscriminate killing. I presented this to show the audience the specific quotes that I deployed during this time, to learn how to delegitimize and discredit the extremist narrative.

In the end, this was a chronological trajectory beginning with my own personal life from the 70’s to mid 1990’s, before the advent of social media, then into the post 9/11 environment of domestic terror incidents such as the Boston bombings, London underground attacks, other interdicted plots in Canada, Australia and elsewhere, and then finally(?) the horror show of ISIS.

Especially today in the world of social media, processes of radicalization that previously took much longer through face-to-face mobilization in the 80’s and 90’s, seem to have been accelerated online. This is primarily

because social media acts as an amplifier more so than a cause proper. There are underlying issues of ideology and grievances and the interplay between them, as well as human factors of mental health, personal failures and personal networks, from where the journey begins and what I had hoped to do with my speaking slot, was to condense and contextualize that entire process into basically one hour! I hope I did achieve that and once again, my sincerest thanks to CASIS Vancouver for having me.

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