Global neo-Jihadi Terrorism in the West & the Turn to Political Violence

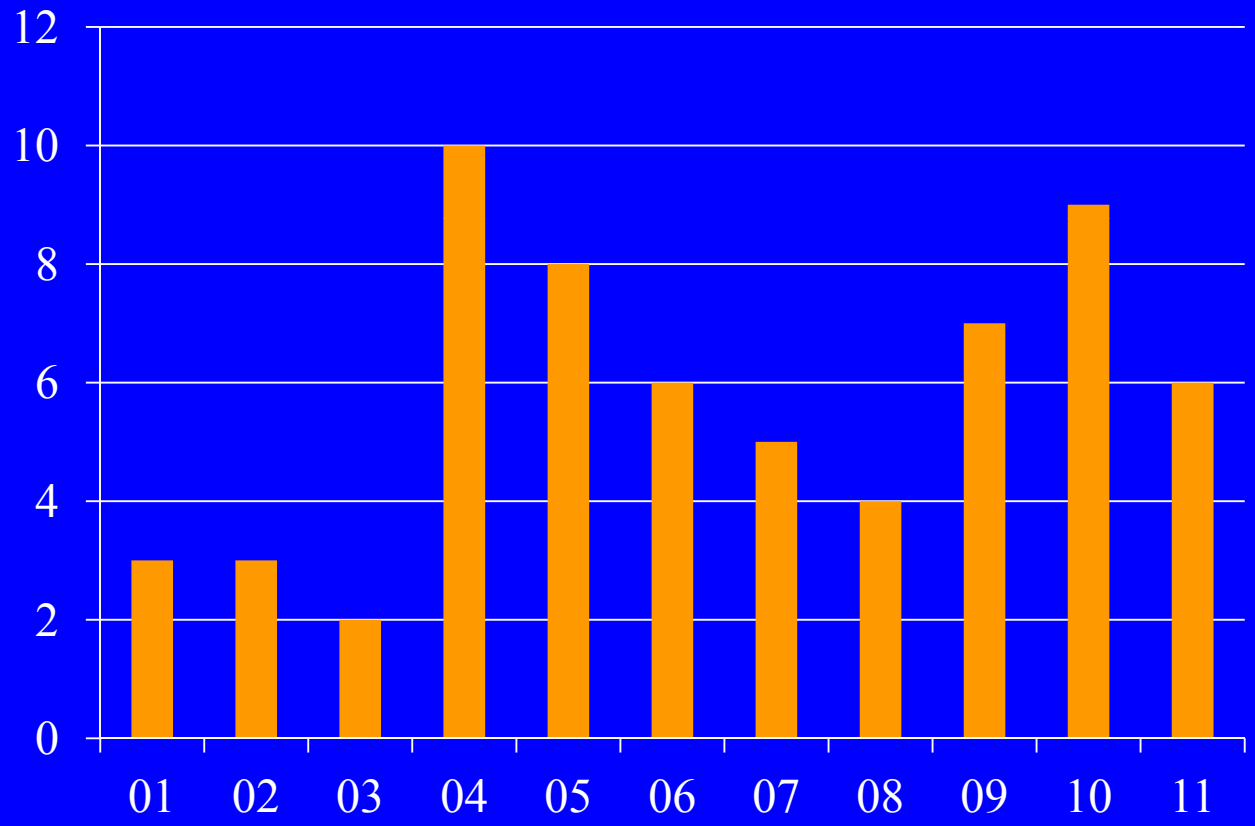
Marc Sageman, M.D., Ph.D.

sageman@post.harvard.edu

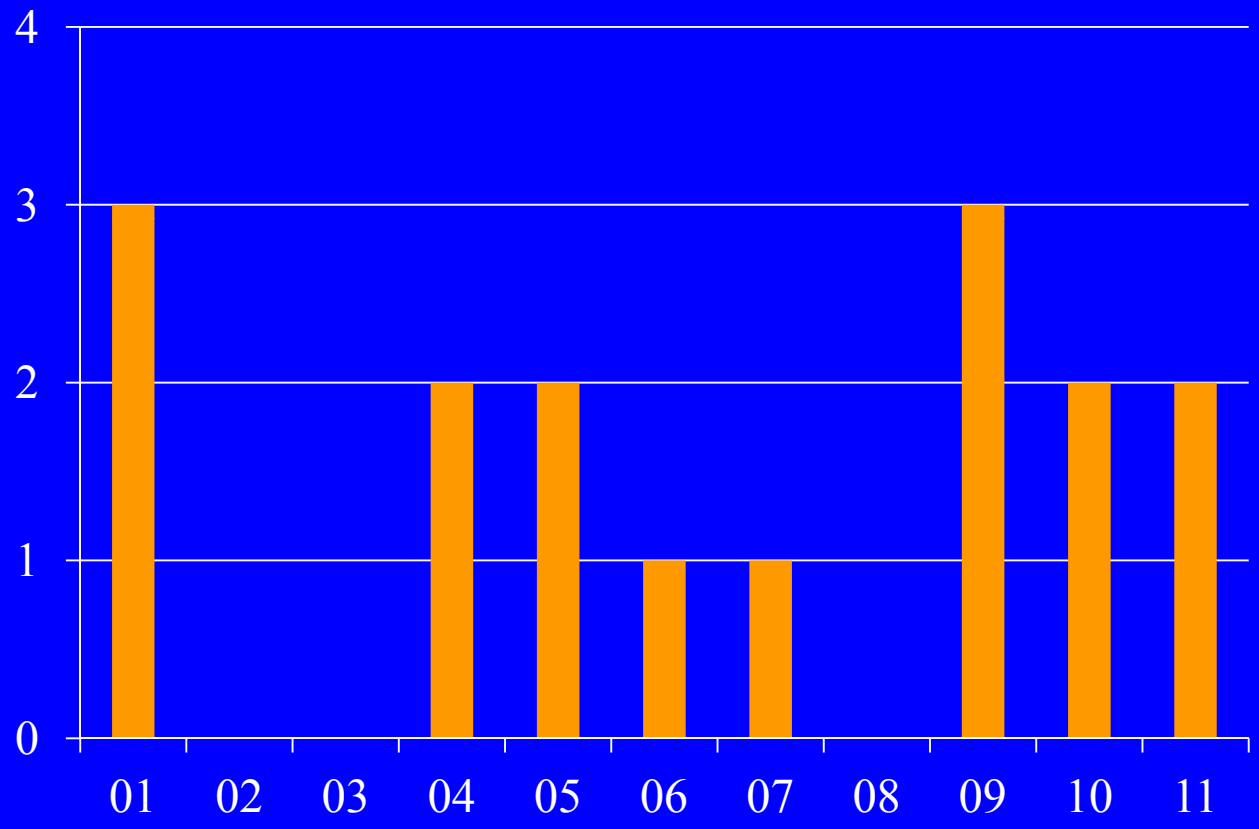
What is the threat?

- Global neo-Jihadi Terrorism in the West
  - Use of violence by non-state collective actors against non-combatants in the West in pursuit of a global neo-jihad
- What is the trend in the West since 9/11 (duplicated x 3)
  - In the name of global neo-Jihad
  - Acts in furtherance
  - No sting operations
  - No loners with mental disorders and no link to global neo-Jihad
- 63 Plots in the West

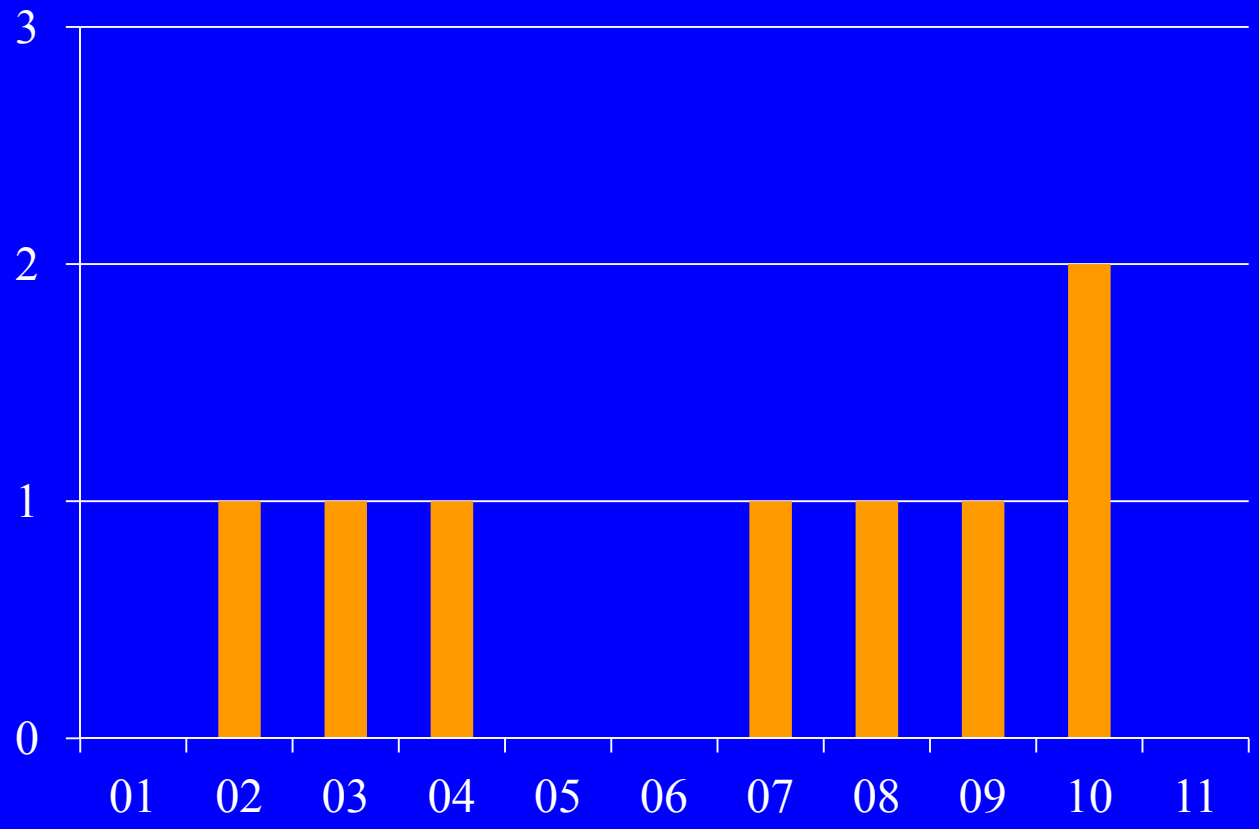
Global neo-Jihadi Terrorist Plots in the West since 9/11



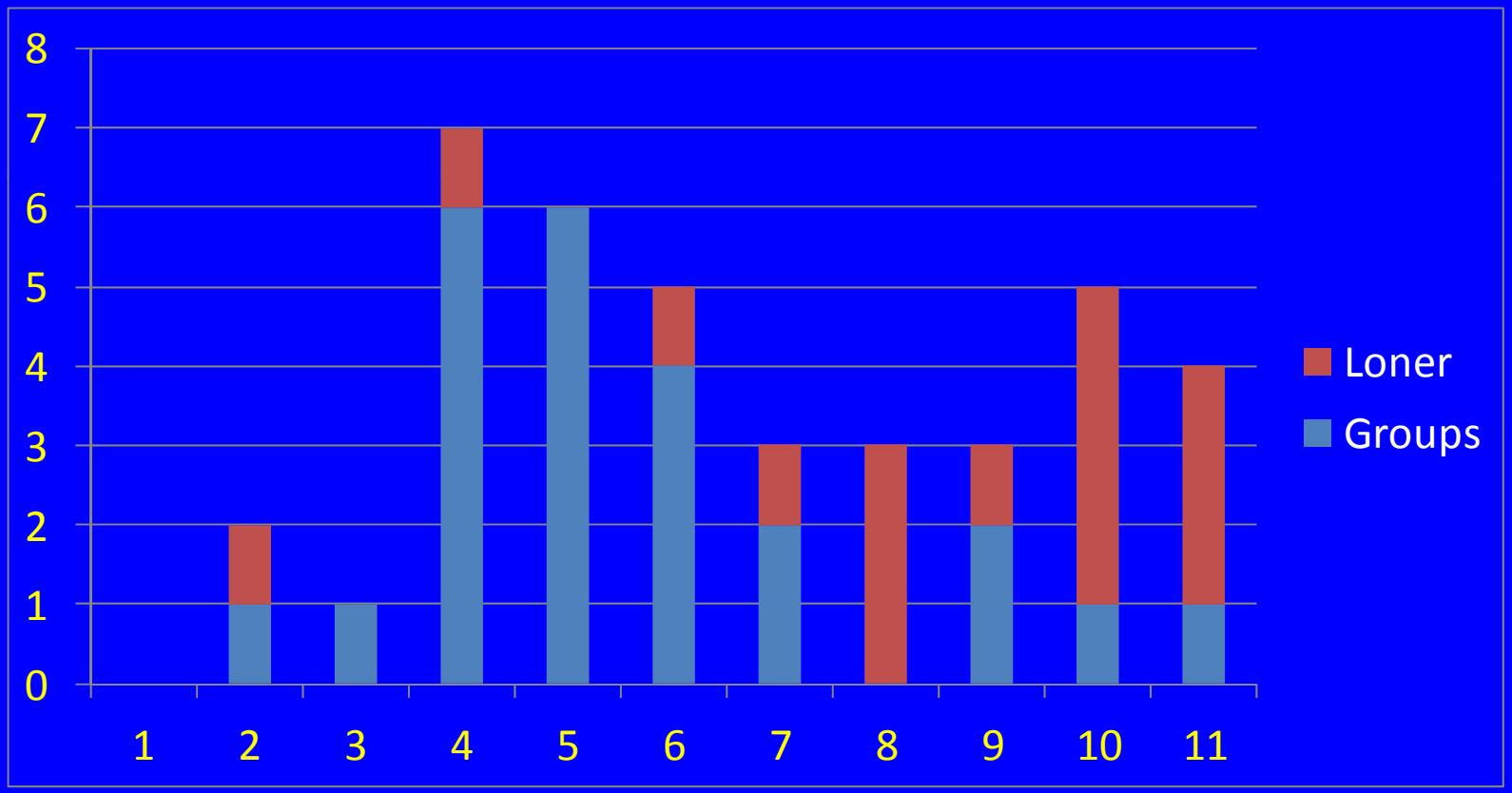
AQ Plots in the West



AQ Affiliates Plots in the West



GnJT Homegrown Plots in the West



The turn to political violence

- Political violence emerges out of a specific context
- 2-STEP PROCESS
  1. Involvement in political protest community (still legal)
  2. Turn to violence (illegal: extremist violence)
- Very low base rate: 4/100 million/year
- SPECIFICITY:
  - Focus on transition from 1 to 2, by comparing violent guys with controls in the political protest community

Discursive Political Protest Community

- Politically active
  - Demonstrations, internet forums, social media
- Anchored by specific symbols & rituals
  - Jihadi cool youth counter-culture → life style
- Rejects both Western society AND parental traditions
- Political protest social movement: social blob
  - Vague, diffuse, porous & fuzzy boundaries
  - Internally very fluid, No central command & control
- Joins through friendship and kinship
- Now strongly influence by the Internet: virtual blob

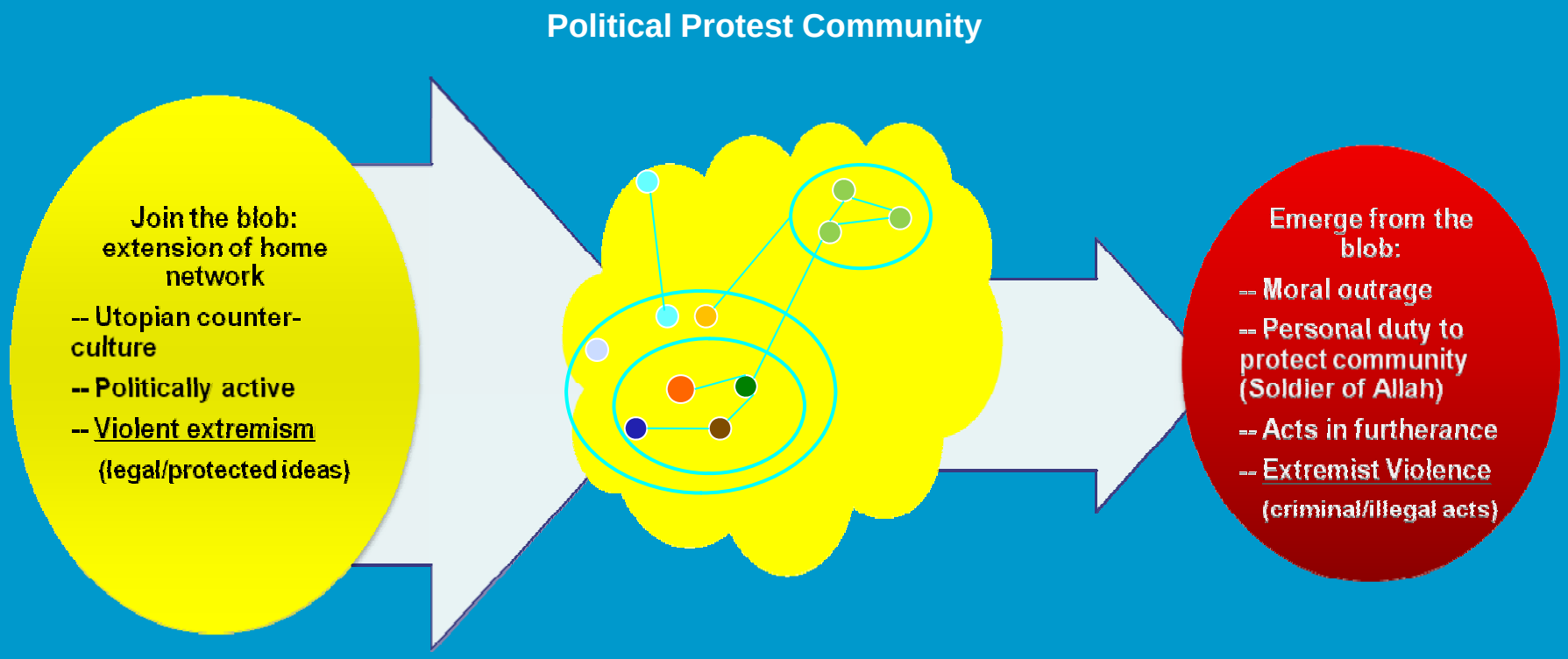
2nd Step: Turn to political violence

- Moral Outrage: Emotional driver for violence
- Disillusionment with effectiveness of blob
  - Too involved to simply abandon political activism
  - Criticism of blob leaders or imams ("talk, talk, talk…"), leave mosque
  - Rejection of blob & non-violent tactics: "enough is enough"
  - Personal duty to protect *ummah*: *Fard 'Ayn*
  - Martial identity: SoA, martial activities

Gradual increase in suspicious activities

- Initiation of a conspiracy by an active core
- Travel abroad for fighting or training
- ↑ interest in legitimacy of killing
- ↑ interest in terrorist activities (may be illegal)
  - Downloading information for skill acquisition
  - Discussing terrorist activities online, practicing, casing targets
  - Financing operations: personal $/ fraudulent loans (not expensive)
- **Getting means of destruction (may be illegal)**

Turn To Violence: 2 Step Process



"Blob: A loose amorphous collection of people who act without a central command"

Turn to political to violence

- Violence comes at the tail end of political social movement
  - ↓ blob → ↑ people frustrated with it & turning to violence
  - Disorganized, scattered: loners
    - Often mediated by social media
- Not linear path: 2 step process
  - Fits & starts; zigzag patterns of commitments according to local & foreign historical contingencies
- Not deterministic: most give up even at advanced stage
- Very rare events:
  - Hostile environment & lack of availability
  - Dependent on chance connections & perseverance of active core in pursuit of conspiracy despite ubiquity of difficulties & obstacles

Legal issues

- How to prevent potentially devastating violence (WIMD) when process of becoming violent is NOT deterministic?
  - Threat of terrorism is so inflated: even a near perfect method of detecting terrorists yields an enormous number of false positives.
- How to preserve civil rights, especially political dissent, in a liberal democracy while protecting the population?
  - Being tough on terrorism is popular & politicians rarely resist temptation of enacting and implementing very restrictive laws
- At what point does militant advocacy cross the line to criminal action?
- How do you preserve privacy on the Internet?