

Case 32: Killings at Fort Hood

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The shooting rampage at Fort Hood, Texas, in 2009 by Major Nidal Hasan, an Army psychiatrist, killed 13 and wounded 30 more. It is, if accepted as an act of Muslim extremist terrorism, by far the worst to have taken place in the United States since 9/11. In fact, except for the shooting of one person in Little Rock (Case 26) and of two in the questionable case of the El Al rampage at Los Angeles airport (Case 4), it is the only instance in which Muslim terrorists have killed anyone in the country at all over the decade.

It is possible to see the shootings as the act of a deranged man—along the lines of the Virginia Tech student who went berserk in 2007 and killed 32 with two pistols before committing suicide. However, there is a chain of information about this case that seems to justify its inclusion in the terrorism category. For years, Hasan, a devout Muslim, had been troubled by the notion that Muslims in the army might be put in the position of killing other Muslims. As he pointed out in a briefing in 2007, the Koran specifically says that hell is the punishment for the intentional killing of a believer, and he proposed that Muslims in the military be permitted to evoke a form of conscientious objection under those conditions.

When his concerns failed to alter policy, he tried without success to get out of the service, offering to pay back the money the military had put up for his education. Then, in 2009 he learned he would soon be deployed to Afghanistan to become a direct part of what he clearly saw as a Muslim-killing machine, and he was deployed to Fort Hood in Texas to await transfer. While there, he bought a pistol, the first gun he ever owned, and, presumably realizing he had no appropriate training, engaged in target practice with the weapon. He also became increasingly incoherent. Three weeks before he was scheduled to be sent overseas, he went, presumably by plan, to the place on the base where soldiers are processed to go to Afghanistan and opened fire while shouting “Allahu Akbar” (God is Great). He was apparently somewhat selective in his targeting, and only one of his killing victims was a civilian. Hasan was shot by guards, and remains paralyzed from the waist down. He has remained silent.

The reaction to this attack is somewhat surprising. Since 9/11, Americans have been waiting for the other shoe to fall, and there have been many ominous claims that the “next attack” would evoke a cataclysm of self-destructive fury on the part of the public. But nothing like that happened after Hasan’s rampage even though it has generally been taken to be a case of Islamic terrorism. Although obviously far less costly than the terrorist event of 2001, it failed to generate much outrage or demand for an outsized response. Indeed, a year later it was scarcely remembered, as when the prominent journalist, James Fallows, mused about raising “the *certainty* that some day another terrorist attack will succeed” without noting that one had already taken place.¹

¹ James Fallows, “The Evolution of the TSA,” www.theatlantic.com, December 8, 2010, emphasis in the original.

Case 32: Killings at Fort Hood

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1. Overview

On November 5, 2009, Major Nidal Malik Hasan, aged 39, an army psychiatrist and a devout Muslim stationed at Fort Hood in Texas, opened fire with a pistol within the Soldiers Readiness Processing Center where soldiers were being processed for deployment to the war in Afghanistan. The rampage killed 12 military personnel and one civilian and wounded more than 30 more. It ended after Hasan was disabled by police.¹ Hasan himself was scheduled to be deployed to Afghanistan, where he would be part of a force that was fighting and killing Muslims, three weeks later on November 28.

However clear Hasan's guilt may appear, the motivations and causal forces behind his rampage are still under great debate. If this is accepted as a case of Muslim extremist terrorism, it is only one of two that have inflicted any casualties in the United States since 9/11, and the only one to have resulted in the deaths of more than one person.

Hasan, now paralyzed from the waist down, awaits trial. He has refused to speak about the attack.

2. Nature of the adversary

Hasan was born on September 8, 1970 in Arlington, Virginia, to Jordanian parents of Palestinian descent. His father, Malik Awadallah Hasan immigrated to Virginia in 1962 at the age of 16. Hasan's mother, Hanan Ismail "Nora" Hasan also immigrated around the same time. The Hasans owned Capitol Restaurant, a dive with a bad reputation and many destitute regulars, at the Roanoke City Market from 1987 to 1995. After closing Capitol, the Hasans briefly operated a Mediterranean-themed restaurant, Mount Olive. The family also owned the Community Grocery Store in Roanoke. Hasan's father died in 1998 of heart disease and his mother in 2001 of kidney disease.²

Even though Hasan did not seem to have trouble integrating as a first generation American, his social skills were still lacking. While his brother Eyad or "Eddie" would socialize with others in the neighborhood, Hasan was described as a "studious" boy who was primarily concerned with school work and often received good grades.³ After skipping around from school to school, he graduated from William Fleming High School in 1988. He then attended Barstow Community College in California and followed by attending Virginia Western Community College, graduating in 1992 with an associate's degree. Hasan then enrolled at Virginia Tech, graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in

¹ Madeleine Gruen, "The Massacre at Fort Hood: Report 24 in the 'Target' America Series," NEFA Foundation, February 2010, 2-3.

² Matt Chittum and Jorge Valencia, "Suspected Fort Hood Shooter Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan: Social Awkwardness Kept with Him into Adulthood," *Roanoke Times*, November 6, 2009.

³ Chittum and Valencia, "Suspected Fort Hood Shooter."

biochemistry in 1997, while being an active member of the ROTC.⁴ Many of Hasan's family members claimed his parents did not want him to go into the military but Hasan did so anyway, claiming it was his duty to his country and that the military was his life.⁵

In 2001, Hasan was admitted to the Uniformed Services University of Health Services in Bethesda, Maryland. In exchange for a seven-year commitment to military service after graduation, Hasan received the full salary and benefits of an officer. He completed his residency at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center with his superiors often commenting on his absenteeism and his poor relationship with patients. One superior even remarked that Hasan might be at risk for developing psychosis, while another supervisor cited him in 2007 for unprofessional behavior. This behavior included the inappropriate discussion of religion, underperformance, and being overweight. In the same year, Hasan gave a lecture entitled "The Koranic World View as it Relates to Muslims in the U.S. military" to his colleagues.⁶ The lecture expressed his belief that Muslims should not have to serve in the military if they are being exposed to hurting other Muslims, citing several examples of recent defections as reason why.

In spite of his poor overall performance, Hasan continued to be promoted within the military; earning the rank of Captain in 2003 and Major in 2009. However, as reported by Hasan's family, he actually attempted to get out of the army by obtaining a lawyer and offering to repay the cost of his education.⁷

Throughout his military education and career, it appears Hasan became more in touch with his Muslim faith. Hasan attended the Muslim Community Center while in Silver Springs, Maryland. Although MCC may not be recognized as a radicalizing center, a representative from "Muslims for a Safe America" spoke there in January of 2010 on whether Muslims should be loyal to America. The lecture gave six arguments for and six arguments against, allowing room for radicalization. While at the Maryland mosque, he actively looked for a wife with equal devotion to his faith through matrimonial services; however, he remained single.

Hasan also attended the Dar-al Hijrah mosque in Falls Church, Virginia during the same time that the radical imam, Anwar al-Awlaki, was there.⁸

Clearly, Hasan was a man who tried to use his faith to make up for his lack of social relationships. It was Hasan who reached out to both local mosques and Muslim leaders abroad for guidance and friendship. However, he seemed to remain isolated even in the Muslim community.

He was deployed in July 2009 to Fort Hood in Texas. There he attended the Islamic Community of Greater Killeen and formed a friendship with an 18-year old convert, Duane Reasoner—one of the few friendships he ever formed. He took Reasoner out to dinner several times to discuss religion and seemed to see himself as a mentor to the convert, who would later condone Hasan's attack.⁹

⁴ Gruen, "Massacre at Fort Hood," 6.

⁵ Chittum and Valencia. "Suspected Fort Hood Shooter."

⁶ Gruen, "Massacre at Fort Hood," 7.

⁷ Gruen, "Massacre at Fort Hood," 7.

⁸ Gruen, "Massacre at Fort Hood," 12-13.

⁹ Gruen, "Massacre at Fort Hood," 14.

While Hasan had no criminal record and was deemed at least mentally stable enough to attend military schools, it appears his self-recruited radicalism may be the triggering factor in the attack.

The imam at the mosque in Texas claimed Hasan was almost incoherent in conversations in the months prior to the attack.

3. Motivation

There are several arguments for what motivated Hasan's rampage. All are rooted in Hasan's objection to the current involvement of the United States military in overseas conflict.

Hasan did not hate Americans for who they are (morals and values), but for what they do (foreign policy). In one argument about his motivations, it is suggested that Hasan was motivated by extremist Islamist views and his religious objection to the wars in the Middle East. Islamist fundamentalist groups point to specific verses in the Koran that advocate for the very actions Hasan carried out. First, "Wala' wa Bara," meaning loyalty and enmity, obliges Muslims to maintain absolute loyalty to Islam, while renouncing all things non-Islamic. Second, "Taqiyya," meaning deception of the enemy, justifies deception as fundamental to loyalty. Lastly, "Da'wa" disallows Muslims from residing within enemy organizations unless they have an alternative plan. Thus, Hasan validated his engagement with the enemy by becoming a soldier of Allah.¹⁰ If Hasan indeed became radicalized over the years, it would be hard to accept these specific verses literally while maintaining loyalty to the United States military.

According to this argument, it does appear that Hasan followed a rather generic path in his radicalization process. He started with his search for fulfillment through spiritual guidance and then became engaged with jihadist ideology through the internet. This newly adopted ideology of the West and Islam being completely incompatible would have worked to expand his grievances from the abstract world-view to personal objections. His communication with an online enabler, Anwar al-Awlaki, may have reinforced Hasan's hostility and finally led to his decision to kill.¹¹ Although his radicalization process is easily traced here, it may have been harder to identify earlier due to its almost entirely internal path.

Another argument notes that, while Hasan may have been acting alone, his attack followed a known tactic of terrorist organizations. Al-Qaeda encourages its members to infiltrate enemy armies.¹² Hasan's communication with Anwar al-Awlaki seems to indicate his sympathy for al-Qaeda. Upon realizing that another attack on the scale of the September 11 attack is not probable, al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations have adopted smaller-scale plans as more cost effective and more effective overall. If less capital and training are necessary for an attack, then intervention by counter-terrorism agencies is less likely. Groups such as al-Qaeda also seem to realize the importance of media coverage even in failed attacks.

¹⁰ Raymond Ibrahim, "Nidal Hasan and Fort Hood: A Study in Muslim Doctrine," November 18, 2009.

¹¹ Brian M. Jenkins, "Going Jihad: The Fort Hood Slayings and Homegrown Terrorism," RAND Corporation, November 2009.

¹² Gruen, "Massacre at Fort Hood," 22.

Thus, al-Qaeda is recruiting homegrown terrorists, as media coverage of these incidents is even higher.¹³ So, although Hasan may not have been directly motivated by involvement in a terrorist group, his attack certainly provides a replicable model for more would-be terrorists, and he is now claimed by al-Qaeda as one of their own. The question remains, however, whether he realized his actions were consistent with al-Qaeda or if he hoped to help the group or had no intention either way.

Many in the Muslim community and those concerned about civil rights caution against blaming the incident on fundamental Islamic beliefs and argue for other possible motivations. Hasan worked on the issue of combat stress in the Center for Study of Traumatic Stress, which assessed the behavioral risks of traumatic events such as combat and terrorism. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the most common disorder linked to combat stress and develops after traumatic events threaten to or cause great physical harm. Although Hasan had never been in combat, he may have been suffering from the same combat stress returning soldiers experience due to his frequent exposure to their stories.¹⁴ His impending deployment to a combat zone may have been the final trigger.

So, Hasan may have been suffering from Vicarious Transmission or compassion fatigue. Treating soldiers traumatized by war is, in itself, risky behavior. Psychologists must listen to detailed descriptions of horrifying events and witness the psychological and physical effects of this violence. When psychologists empathetically engage with their patients, they may experience the same physical, emotional, and cognitive symptoms as their patients.¹⁵ Ironically, veterans' rights groups had warned the military about the possibility of such incidents. They suggest that in order to reverse the current trend, the military needs to increase the number of mental health care providers, such as those filling Hasan's position. Also, the military must stop lowering recruiting standards and increase medical exams for soldiers returning from combat.¹⁶

However, this may just be one more indicator of how overstretched the United States military is. The military simply cannot afford to further restrict recruiting standards or hire more mental health professionals when they are already so strained in several different conflicts overseas. The rising level of combat stress leading to a rising number of stress-related homicides and suicides among the military may be due to the fact that many troops are in their third and fourth tour of combat. The rate of army suicides was confirmed at 20.2 per 100,000 in 2008. Studies suggest that as many as one-third of returning soldiers suffer from emotional problems.¹⁷ However overstretched the army may seem, there continue to be more troops deployed overseas, which may result in more attacks like Hasan's.

¹³ Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, "Assessing the Terrorist Threat," The Bipartisan Policy Center: The National Security Preparedness Group, September 10, 2010, 17-18.

¹⁴ "A Link to PTSD?" *Star Tribune*. November 5, 2009.

¹⁵ Todd Essig, "Vicarious Traumatization: PTSD Is Contagious and Deadly," *True/Slant*, November 5, 2009.

¹⁶ Ewen MacAskill, "Major Nidal Malik Hasan: Soldiers' Psychiatrist Who Listened to Stories from Frontline," *Guardian*, November 6, 2009.

¹⁷ MacAskill, "Major Nidal Malik Hasan."

Another argument for Hasan's motivations claims that he seemed to be socially marginalized by fellow officers. According to colleagues, he had been mocked by fellow soldiers for his Middle Eastern background and his Muslim faith. Colonel Terry Lee, who had worked with Hasan in Texas, claimed he had witnessed altercations between Hasan and other officers over his Muslim views. Noel Hasan, his aunt, claimed that one of the major factors in Hasan's request to be discharged was the constant name-calling and harassment he had suffered since the September 11 attacks.¹⁸ Thus, Hasan's rampage may have been motivated solely by social and psychological issues and failures of the United States military, rather than an extremist faith.

4. Goals

Major Hasan may have had two major, but not exclusive, goals in mind when he opened fire at Fort Hood. One goal, in relation to the first argument for his motivations noted above, is to help the greater Muslim community. Hasan openly disagreed with deploying Muslim soldiers to combat areas where they would be exposed to harming or killing other Muslims. This is exemplified by the presentation he gave in 2007 in which he aimed to describe what the Koran instills in Muslim minds and the implications this has for the military, the religious conflicts that Muslims may be having with the current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and possible examples of the results of this conflict.

In the slides, Hasan cites verses from the Koran that forbid killing other Muslims and foster complete submission to God, Allah. He then gives several examples of soldiers whom he believes could not reconcile their faith with their duty to their country and who therefore defected. This includes Hasan Akbar, Army Captain James Yee, Marine Corporal Waseef Ali Hassoun, and Army Sergeant Abdullah William Webster. Hasan also quotes verses inciting fear of God and referencing the rewards and punishments of God. He concludes with several broad statements that fit into the ideology of many terrorist organizations: God expects full loyalty and cannot be seen as moderate, and fighting to create an Islamic state to please God is warranted under Islam. Thus, he recommends that the Department of Defense allow Muslim soldiers the option to be released as "conscientious objectors." He claims this would increase troop morale and decrease unfavorable incidents.¹⁹ Thus, Hasan may have believed that his actions would show the importance of allowing Muslims to opt out of military service. He may have been trying to make a larger point about the wars in the Middle East and the Muslim view of the wars as wars against Islam. This goal would be in line with the goals of larger terrorist networks.

However, some may suggest that Hasan had an alternative but similar goal. He may have simply been concerned only with his own coming deployment, as he was still serving the mandatory seven years for his military education. Hasan was never described as a violent man; according to those close to him, he even had a distaste for violence.²⁰ The shooting occurred just weeks before Hasan

¹⁸ Anne Davies, "Why Doctor Snapped," *The Age*, November 7, 2009.

¹⁹ The slides can be seen at www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Hasan2.pdf.

²⁰ MacAskill. "Major Nidal Malik Hasan."

was scheduled to be deployed to Afghanistan (November 28, 2009). His family and colleagues commented on his deep concerns about being sent to Iraq or Afghanistan. Having treated many returning soldiers suffering from stress disorders, Hasan already knew the daily horrors occurring in the combat zone. Hasan described feeling trapped and even became desperate enough to try to buy his way out. He hired a lawyer to inquire into leaving the military service honorably, promising to repay the cost of his education.²¹

Thus, the rampage may have been the act of one desperate man who knew all too well the dreadfulness of combat without ever engaging himself. Hasan may have seen the shooting as his only way out. This would raise questions about his mental state and about whether his actions should be considered terrorism. Although never described as mentally ill, as noted earlier, one supervisor did comment on his risk for developing psychosis.

5. Plans for violence

It is unclear when exactly Hasan planned the attack and decided to actually follow through on it. He had acquired a concealed weapon permit years earlier in 1996, long before becoming disgruntled with the army.²² He was deployed to Fort Hood in July 2009, and on August 1 he bought a FN 5.7 Herstal tactical pistol, with some reports claiming he also purchased a laser sight, from Guns Galore in Killeen. This is the pistol also known as the “cop killer” due to the availability of ammunition to authorized personnel that can pierce bullet-proof vests, and it can be used with a clip extension holding up to 31 rounds. An FBI background check was completed at the time of purchase, but this information was never shared with the Joint Terrorism Task Force in Washington that had inquired earlier into Hasan’s earlier activities and into his communications with Anwar al-Awlaki. There was thus a lack of cooperation between government agencies.

Guns Galore employee Fredrick Brannon claimed Hasan made an odd request for the “most high-tech pistol available.” However, he seemed to have little knowledge of guns, as evidenced by video footage on Hasan’s cellular phone of the gun store manager demonstrating how to use the gun. To gain training, he took classes at Stan’s Outdoor Shooting Range, beginning with one on concealed handguns on October 10, 2009, a month before the shootings. John Choats, part-owner, claims Hasan bought a membership and would return once or twice a week to practice long-range shooting with the pistol on the rifle range. Choats recalls that he would engage in unusual behavior such as aiming for the head and chest on silhouette targets from quite a distance rather than the usual bull’s-eye targets.²³ This seems to be in direct conflict with Hasan’s family’s claims about Hasan’s non-violent nature—or else it suggests an abrupt and substantial change from it. In addition to the pistol, Hasan also had a .357 S&W Magnum revolver

²¹ James Dao, “Fort Hood Suspect Was ‘Mortified’ About Deployment,” *New York Times*, November 5, 2009.

²² Gruen, “Massacre at Fort Hood,” 6.

²³ Angela K. Brown and Michael Graczyk, “Witnesses in Fort Hood Case Tell of Hasan’s Gun Purchase, Training,” *Star-Telegram*, October 22, 2010.

on his person during the attack; however, whether or not he used it has yet to be officially stated.²⁴

Prior to the attack, Hasan gave away possessions including furniture, food, and clothing, though he had little of these considering the simple and isolated life he led.²⁵ He even gave one of his neighbors, who is not a Muslim, a copy of the Koran,²⁶ and this act may support the argument that Hasan was religiously motivated.

At approximately 1:30pm on November 5, 2009, Hasan began his shooting rampage with the tactical pistol in the Soldier Readiness Center where soldiers are processed for deployment overseas. Dressed in uniform, he shouted “Allahu Akbar” (God is Great), a battle cry to some, prior to the 10 minute shooting, which killed 12 soldiers and one civilian, while injuring more than 30 others. There were 400 people at the Center at the time and about 600 more at the nearby Howze Theater attending a graduation ceremony. Quick-thinking soldiers closed off the theater and some began to treat their injured comrades by using their own clothing as bandages.²⁷

Throughout the shooting, military police and civilian officers began to exchange fire with Hasan. Sergeant Mark Todd and Sergeant Kimberly Munley responded to the 911 call and found Hasan’s position after bystanders pointed it out to them. After giving commands to Hasan to stop and drop his weapon, the officers decided the use of their firearms was necessary. Munley was shot three times in the attempt, and it was Todd whose shots disabled Hasan as he tried to reload his gun. Once Hasan’s gun had been secured, officers immediately began life-saving measures. Hasan remained in a coma for a period of time, but is now conscious and is paralyzed below the waist.²⁸

Clearly, Hasan had prepared himself for the fact that in all likelihood this was a suicide mission; he only survived by chance and by quick life-saving measures.

Following his deadly rampage, he was detained and is now involved in a long legal process. He has refused to speak with investigators and he has now been charged with 13 counts of premeditated murder and 32 counts of attempted premeditated murder. These crimes were committed under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, so he is eligible for the death penalty if convicted on the charges. Hasan is represented by Colonel John P. Galligan, while the Army’s lead prosecutor is Colonel Michael Mulligan. On November 21, 2009, a military magistrate ruled that there was probable cause that Hasan committed the crimes and he is, therefore, ordered to pre-trial confinement. Shortly after, Galligan announced that Hasan would likely plead not guilty to all charges and use an insanity defense plea. The exam to determine his mental state at the time of the

²⁴ Matthew Cole, Pierre Thomas, Jason Ryan, and Richard Esposito, “‘Cop Killer’ Gun Thought To Be Used In Ft. Hood Shooting,” ABC News, November 6, 2009.

²⁵ Gruen, “Massacre at Fort Hood,” 18.

²⁶ Maria Newman and Michael Brick, “Neighbor Says Hasan Gave Belongings Away Before Attack,” *New York Times*, November 6, 2009.

²⁷ “Timeline: Fort Hood Shootings,” BBC News, November 12, 2009.

²⁸ Chris Cuomo, “FBI Investigates Maj. Hasan Gun Purchase; Hero Cop Talks About Shooting,” ABC News, November 12, 2009.

shooting as well as his current mental state concerning his competency to stand trial was delayed until after the Article 32 hearing. Hasan was moved out of the Brooke Army Medical Center and into the Bell County Jail in April of 2010.²⁹ The Article 32 proceedings began in mid-October and ended, without the defense presenting any evidence and with the military judge recommending a trial with a possible death sentence. This recommendation is still awaiting the results of a military sanity board's evaluation.³⁰

6. Role of informants

There were no informants in this case.

7. Connections

Important in this case are the connections between Hasan and the radical imam, Anwar al-Awlaki.

Although al-Awlaki is a dual citizen of both the United States and Yemen and lived in the United States for over 20 years, he is now considered one of America's most wanted terrorists. He was the spiritual advisor to the 9/11 hijackers Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Midhar and has been linked to the underwear bomber, Umar Abdulmutallab, who attempted to blow up a Detroit-bound airplane on Christmas Day 2009 (Case 33).³¹ He has also been associated with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) where he now resides.

The most worrisome tactic al-Awlaki has taken is his use of the internet to radicalize young Muslims, including Americans and many English speaking people. He uses pamphlets, audio recordings, and videos to teach these young Muslims about jihad and the establishment of Sharia law. He also takes radicalization from the inspirational process to the operational one. Al-Awlaki's appeal to the youth is related not only to the easily understood content but also to his distribution using the internet via Facebook, YouTube, and other social media sites.³² Clearly, al-Awlaki is a dangerous man with the ability to manipulate Muslims into becoming violent extremists.

As noted earlier, Major Hasan attended the same mosque as Anwar al-Awlaki in Virginia, and it is quite possible that his lectures had at least some influence on Hasan. However, their connection is much deeper than that. Hasan must have been familiar with al-Awlaki's work to have contacted him by e-mail and thus knew much of what al-Awlaki was preaching to his young audiences.

The FBI had been tracking al-Awlaki, and Hasan's e-mail exchanges with him were investigated prior to the shooting in Fort Hood. According to al-Awlaki, Hasan initiated e-mail contact on December 17, 2008 and they exchanged approximately 20 messages. Hasan had inquired whether a Muslim soldier killing his fellow American soldiers is a religiously condoned act or not. He also gave his opinion on targeting the Jews in Israel, using religious validation of using missiles

²⁹ "Nidal Malik Hasan," Wikipedia, accessed November 29, 2010.

³⁰ Jeremy Schwartz, "Army Judge Recommends Hasan Trial with Possible Death Sentence," Statesman.com, November 17, 2010.

³¹ Christopher Heffelfinger, "Anwar Al-'Awlaqi: Profile of a Jihadi Radicalizer," *CTC Sentinel*, March 2010, 1-4.

³² Heffelfinger, "Anwar Al-'Awlaqi."

to target civilians. Al-Awlaki claims Hasan also inquired into ways in which he could transfer funds and participate in charitable movements.³³

In February of 2009, several months before the shootings, the San Diego FBI field office sent a file containing Hasan's personal records and two of the 20 e-mails to the FBI's Washington field office. The Washington field office concluded that the content of the e-mails was consistent with the research that Hasan was doing at the Walter Reed Army Medical center at the time. Some files are reported to have contained information that Hasan wanted to prosecute some of his military patients for war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan they had confessed to when they returned. After this first transfer of information, the San Diego office did not forward any additional information, and the FBI stopped investigating Hasan.³⁴

Not only was there a failure in communication between FBI offices but there may have also been a failure in communication between the FBI and Walter Reed Medical Hospital. Instead of obtaining the training file, it is likely that Hasan's personnel file was examined. The training file contained poor reviews and warning memos about Hasan's performance and his improper religious discussions. On the other hand, the personnel file contains basic information such as rank, awards, and military history.³⁵ Had the FBI examined the training file, they may have made the connections between Hasan's tendency toward religious fundamentalism and his questionable state of mind.

Although it has been determined by all investigating parties that Hasan worked alone and therefore was a "lone wolf" in his shooting rampage, he still had several weak connections to terrorists before and after the attack. Taking into account all known evidence, Hasan was self-motivated in his radicalization and other than his limited connections, there was no larger terrorist networks actually operating to facilitate the attack. The exact content of most of the e-mails has not been released and it is unclear just how influential al-Awlaki was in motivating Hasan.

Although al-Qaeda has instructed its members to penetrate enemy armies and to occupy powerful positions as Hasan did, there is no indication that Hasan had any connection to the terrorist group or any other group. It appears through Hasan's communication with al-Awlaki, that he had sympathy for al-Qaeda but no further ties to the organization.

However, after the attack, Hasan's actions were glorified and cited as a recommended example by the terrorist group. Shortly after the attack, a militant website featured a 25-minute video of al-Qaeda's American spokesperson, Adam Gardahn also known as Azzam al-Amriki, commending Hasan as a pioneer and role model. He cites military bases as high-value targets and suggests the possibility of attacking other such targets with some imagination and

³³ "On Al-Jazeera.net - First Interview with U.S.-Born Yemen-Based Imam Anwar Al-'Awlaki on Major Hasan and the Fort Hood Shooting," The Middle East Media Research Institute, December 23, 2009.

³⁴ Gruen, "Massacre at Fort Hood," 17.

³⁵ Daniel Zwerdling, "Did A File Error Stall FBI Inquiry Into Hasan?" National Public Radio, November 25, 2009.

preparation.³⁶ Other Islamist movements have also portrayed Hasan as a hero worth emulating. Although this may seem worrisome for those concerned by the potential for a rise in homegrown terrorism, it actually suggests that the organizations may be weakening. By claiming Hasan as one of their own, the terrorist organizations may be showing that they no longer have the resources to carry out large scale attacks and must rely on smaller, less destructive lone-wolf style attacks.³⁷

8. Relation to the Muslim community

Throughout his later life, it appears Hasan had become more connected with his Muslim faith and perhaps more radicalized in the process. However he remained isolated even in the Muslim community. One of the few friendships Hasan formed was with the 18-year old convert, Duane Reasoner, who would later condone Hasan's attack and has reportedly posted jihadist sentiments online. Reasoner was also somewhat of a loner.³⁸

So, although Hasan was a regular at the mosques he attended, rarely missing a prayer or service, he was still not really well connected to the Muslim community prior to his attacks, and he was certainly not embraced by the majority after the incident. The active Muslim community in Killeen, Texas expressed their outrage shortly after the shooting. Most expressed anger with Hasan as an individual and hoped others would not blame the religion. Some, although accepting Hasan's responsibility, suggest that maybe it is time for the military to reevaluate their policies on Muslims in the military. This is not to say they are condoning his actions, only pointing to a possible larger issue. The Muslim families in Killeen have lived peacefully with their mostly Christian neighbors for years even in the wake of September 11, and they were shocked by the attack by an educated, successful man. There was some fear of retaliation after the attack but no incidents have been reported.³⁹

In addition to the immediate Muslim community, the national Muslim community and its organizations strongly condemned the act. A news conference was held shortly after the shooting by officials from the Islamic Society of North America, the American Muslim Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Council, and imam Mohamed Magid of the large mosque ADAMS (All Dulles Area Muslim Society) in Virginia. Claiming that some Muslim organizations had already received threatening e-mails, the officials urged people to view Hasan as a lone criminal, rather than as a representative of the Muslim faith. Magid also cited instances of individuals of all faiths refusing to be deployed as further evidence of a lack of religious motivation in the shooting. The conference ended by announcing a donation collection from Muslim Americans that would benefit victims of the shootings. In addition to this press conference, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) issued its own statements condemning the

³⁶ "Al-Qaeda on Alleged Fort Hood Killer: 'Ideal Role Model,'" *USA Today*, March 7, 2010.

³⁷ Patrick Johnson, "Fort Hood Shooting: Al Qaeda Now Portrays Nidal Hasan as Terrorism Star," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 19, 2010.

³⁸ Gruen, "Massacre at Fort Hood," 12-14.

³⁹ Michael Moss, "Muslims at Fort Voice Outrage and Ask Questions," *New York Times*, November 6, 2009.

attack as cowardly insisting that Americans stay focused on responding to and recovering from the rampage.⁴⁰

9. Depiction by the authorities

Within hours of Hasan's deadly shooting rampage, the previous FBI investigation of Hasan was revealed. This led the government agencies involved to begin passing the blame to one another for letting a man with real intent to do harm slip through scrutiny.

Thus, the FBI and the Department of Defense claimed that it was the military and specifically Walter Reed Army Medical Center that was at fault for Hasan slipping through the ranks. In December of 2004, Hasan's superiors recommended him a qualified asset for any post; however, within a week, a committee was assembled that discussed serious concerns about Hasan's behavior and judgment. It is unclear why the military would continue to promote Hasan with his troubling record. Some investigators claim that the promotions were based on an incomplete personnel file that did not contain Hasan's troubling supervisor notes.

Not only was there a failure to share information between departments within the military, the FBI also failed to share its information with the Department of Defense. When Hasan was investigated by a Joint Terrorism Task Force run by the FBI, the Pentagon and Department of Defense were never notified. Many argue that such notice should have occurred considering Hasan's position in the military, and changes to the policy concerning notification of various government agencies are now being considered.⁴¹

In addition to passing the blame, the authorities began a thorough investigation of the attack. Shortly after Hasan's shooting spree, several government agencies released reports that many felt were lacking in some aspects. For example, an 86-page report released by the United States military and the Pentagon about two months after the shooting neglected to contain the suspect's name or his faith and whether this may have been a possible motivation. A member of the 9/11 commission, John Lehman, was not surprised by this and claims that the omission is just one more example of a problem that has been growing worse for years: the almost complete silence on Islamic extremism on the part of the Pentagon. Some claim that government agencies have become so concerned with political correctness that they may be failing to warn Americans of their true enemies. Leaders of the Pentagon review have defended the report citing that the intention of the report is to depict actions and effects and not motivations and goals. They also cited the ongoing criminal investigation as reason why they could not go into further detail or speculation. However, some lawmakers still want explanations, claiming that there would have been no attack without motivation.⁴²

⁴⁰ Michelle Boorstein, "Prominent Muslim Organizations Condemn Fort Hood Shootings," *Washington Post*, November 6, 2009.

⁴¹ Richard Lardner, "DoD Review: Hasan Superiors Ignored Concerns," *Army News*, January 12, 2010.

⁴² Richard Thompson, "Fort Hood Report: No Mention of Islam, Hasan Not Named," *Time*, January 20, 2010.

Another report, the Department of Defense Independent Review Related to Fort Hood, which had been ordered by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, also had the same shortcomings. Despite claiming to contain lessons learned from the incident to protect other bases, the report contains only a single page dedicated to defining who the actual suspect was. Much more space was given to emergency response and force protection, perhaps showing a reactive rather than proactive policy. The report also does not outright name Islamist fundamentalist beliefs; rather, they are combined with all religious fundamentalism beliefs. In addition to refusing to name Islamist extremism directly, the report also claims that not all religious-based violence is perpetrated by fundamentalist groups. In the pursuit of political correctness, the Department of Defense seems to be ignoring important lessons learned from the rise in Islamist extremist activity since 9/11 and its involvement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Lawmakers such as Senator Joseph Lieberman and Representative John Carter have criticized the report, claiming it does not sufficiently acknowledge the threat of Islamist extremism to the United States military. Authority depiction remained relatively consistent throughout the coverage, then. The authorities remain almost silent on Hasan's motivation and have not released any exact report on how Hasan was able to evade further investigation.⁴³

10. Coverage by the media

The shootings at Fort Hood quickly become one of the most important and widely covered issues on the media's agenda. In the days following the shooting, it was the most covered news story in the United States, accounting for more than one-third of all stories. Taking into consideration the disarray and violence of the shootings and given that they occurred on a military base, most of the early coverage was concerning the sequence of events and the number and condition of victims. The basic elements of journalism: who, what, when, and where were covered. However, almost immediately after discerning the concrete facts, another major issue began to materialize: the question of why. Although there were no definitive explanations just yet, a great deal of speculation from all news sources commenced. The "why" aspect became complicated and controversial as the suspect's religion became a central topic. Hasan's religion and its possible implications in the shooting became even more prominent in the media following the report that Hasan had shouted "Allahu Akbar" ("God is Great") just prior to the shooting. The intensity of the focus on religion increased once more when the *New York Times* released a report claiming the Hasan had become disillusioned with the military recently and announcing the FBI investigation into a man calling himself "Nidal Hasan" on the internet speaking positively of suicide bombing. It was noted, however, that it was not clear whether the writer was the shooter or not. Media sources made a serious attempt at remaining competent and responsible and sought to resist sensationalizing the story.⁴⁴

⁴³ Thompson, "Fort Hood Report."

⁴⁴ Mark Jurkowitz, "Shooting Shakes Up Media Stories," Pew Research Center, November 10, 2009.

In the few days following the attack, a sensational debate began concerning Hasan's motives and whether both the media and authorities were playing down his Islamic faith. The traditionally conservative Fox News and the Bill O'Reilly program accused the media of being too concerned with being politically correct by focusing more on the possibility that Hasan was suffering from combat stress than on his religion. In contrast, liberal television host Rachel Maddow interviewed Suhail Khan, a fellow for Christian-Muslim Understanding at the Institute for Global Engagement, on MSNBC and warned against exploiting the tragedy. Liberal media, in general, argued that the loyalty of other Muslims in the military should not be questioned due to their faith. By the end of the week and in the weeks following, the exact motive for the attack remained unresolved and the more conservative media perspective on religion's involvement began to fade. Upon advice from several political and government leaders, such as President Obama and FBI Director Robert S. Mueller, the media began to advise the public against rushing to judgment in the case. Thus, coverage in the weeks and months following the shooting neglects to focus too much on Hasan's religion as a definite motivation, only mentioning it as a possible contributing factor if it is mentioned at all. Although political correctness seems to be the primary focus of the media, the interest in Hasan's religion peaks again with each new detail in the case.⁴⁵

In addition to being extensively covered by the domestic media, international media also covered the shooting comprehensively. Media coverage from most Western countries and Israel, a close ally of the West, issued condolences and warnings for the United States. *The Guardian* in the United Kingdom advised Americans to avoid letting the attack become an excuse for persecution of Muslims within American borders. *The Globe and Mail* in Canada gave a balanced perspective, advising Americans to acknowledge the issue of religion but not to fixate on it. Israel's *Jerusalem Post* recognized America's problem of maintaining an open society, while preventing more attacks of this nature. Media in Southeast Asia, such as China and Hong Kong, used the event as an illustration of war's destructive tendency and the trouble that the United States has created for itself. Meanwhile, newspapers in places closer to the wars in the Middle East, such as Dubai, viewed the event as evidence of the need to end the cycle of violence on a larger scale but also empathized with the victims. The biggest portion of media coverage was dedicated to whether or not religion played an important role in the attack, not only the fact that the shooter was a Muslim. This tendency towards political correctness and maintaining an open society is visible in both domestic and foreign media.⁴⁶

11. Policing cost

The FBI investigation prior to the attack was rather short and not as extensive as many other terrorism cases; thus, it would have carried a low cost. Due to Hasan's suspicious e-mail exchanges with al-Awlaki, Hasan was investigated by the FBI. The FBI had been tracking al-Awlaki and electronic

⁴⁵ Jurkowitz, "Shooting Shakes Up Media Stories."

⁴⁶ "Fort Hood: What the World Is Saying," *The Week Magazine*, November 10, 2009.

intercepts revealed the communication between the two. So, the FBI did not spend any extra money in tapping into Hasan's communication as he was caught while they were investigating another suspected terrorist. In February of 2009, the San Diego FBI field office sent a file containing Hasan's personal records and two of the 20 al-Awlaki e-mails to the FBI's Washington field office. As noted, the Washington field office concluded that the time that the e-mails were sent and the content of the e-mails were consistent with the research that Hasan was doing at the time. After this first transfer of information, the San Diego office did not forward any additional information. Thus, the FBI stopped investigating Hasan.⁴⁷ The likely reason that Hasan was able to slip through this process is the small number of investigators the FBI has in relation to the number of terrorist leads they receive each day. The investigation into Hasan would have only lasted a few days at most, so the cost is close to negligible.

The trial is ongoing, so it is impossible to predict how much it will cost, depending on the duration and the appeals process. An initial hearing had been held in military court under Colonel James Pohl, who made an initial recommendation the Hasan be court-martialed on 13 counts of premeditated murder and 32 counts of attempted premeditated murder. Pohl claims "probable cause" existed from the hearing to support a capital murder case; this could end with Hasan receiving the death penalty. Hasan's lead defense attorney has already made clear that he plans to file objections to this recommendation, extending the trial process.⁴⁸ If the case goes to a capital murder trial and Hasan is found guilty, there will likely be an appeals process, necessitating more time and money. Although the trial has just finished the hearing stages, it appears that, in all likelihood, it will be a quite long and extensive process.

So, although there are no available numbers for policing cost, this case may be relatively cheaper than other terrorism cases. There was no extensive investigation, as compared to other terrorist investigation that cost the government much of taxpayer's money. Also, an overwhelming majority of terrorism cases are complicated and require a long trial process, so the cost of trial is not outlandish.

12. Relevance of the internet

The internet played an important role in the prior and subsequent investigation of Major Hasan's deadly rampage in Fort Hood. Hasan was reaching out to at least one known Islamist extremist, perhaps in his own process of radicalization. It was due to his suspicious e-mail exchanges with al-Awlaki that Hasan was investigated by the FBI.⁴⁹

Al-Awlaki's connection to the internet is also much deeper and important to understand, since he uses it to radicalize young Muslims through pamphlets, audio recordings, and videos. He is unique in his ability to take radicalization from the inspirational process to the operational process. Al-Awlaki's appeal to

⁴⁷ Gruen. "The Massacre at Fort Hood." 17.

⁴⁸ Angela K. Brown, "Army Colonel Recommends Trial in Fort Hood Rampage," *Yahoo! News*, November 17, 2010.

⁴⁹ "On Al-Jazeera.net - First Interview," *The Middle East Media Research Institute*.

the youth is related to not only the easily understood content but also to his distribution using the internet via Facebook, YouTube, and other social sites.⁵⁰ Clearly, al-Awlaki is a dangerous man with the ability to manipulate Muslims into jihadists and it is quite possible that his online lectures had at least some influence on Hasan.

Hasan had also been investigated by law enforcement officials because of internet postings by a man who called himself “Nidal Hasan” on Scribd.com. One of these posts is still on the website and says,

“There was a grenade thrown amongst a group of American soldiers. One of the soldiers, feeling that it was too late for everyone to flee jumped on the grenade with the intention of saving his comrades. Indeed he saved them. He intentionally took his life (suicide) for a noble cause i.e. saving the lives of his soldier. To say that this soldier committed suicide is inappropriate. Its more appropriate to say he is a brave hero that sacrificed his life for a more noble cause. Scholars have paralled this to suicide bombers whose intention, by sacrificing their lives, is to help save Muslims by killing enemy soldiers. If one suicide bomber can kill 100 enemy soldiers because they were caught off guard that would be considered a strategic victory. Their intention is not to die because of some despair. The same can be said for the Kamikazees in Japan. They died (via crashing their planes into ships) to kill the enemies for the homeland. You can call them crazy if you want but their act was not one of suicide that is despised by Islam. So the scholars main point is that ‘IT SEEMS AS THOUGH YOUR INTENTION IS THE MAIN ISSUE’ and Allah (SWT) knows best.”⁵¹

Although suicide in support of their Muslim faith is defended in this post, it has not really been a main focus in the case. This is because law enforcement officials have not determined whether or not Hasan was actually the author of the post. Although federal agents utilized search warrants to seize Hasan’s home computer, they never found any definitive evidence that Hasan was in fact the author. However, if Hasan was the author, this would not be an uncommon activity for a recent convert to fundamentalism.

13. Are we safer?

We are definitely safer now that Major Hasan is imprisoned. Clearly, Hasan was a man with little regard for human life and he is obviously capable of killing many people. According to reports, he was shooting at random and attempting to fire at anyone and anything that moved.⁵² Thus, not only did he show a lack of regard for human life but he also showed that his intention was to inflict the most damage possible in a short amount of time.

This case is a rarity in terrorism cases due to the failure of the FBI investigation to catch a man who had real intention of causing harm. However,

⁵⁰ Heffelfinger, “Anwar Al-`Awlaqi.”

⁵¹ “NidalHasan on Scribd,” Scribd, July 18, 2007, www.scribd.com/NidalHasan.

⁵² Angela K. Brown and Michael Graczyk, “Soldier: Fort Hood Gunman Was Firing at Random,” *Washington Times*, October 18, 2010.

many say the authorities strike too quickly; thus, they are trying to find the right balance between finding real threats and creating entrapment situations. So, the most important thing for law enforcement to decipher when investigating terrorist suspects is their intent. Juries convict terrorists based on their intent, not solely their abilities or ideals.⁵³ These cases, however, are never clear-cut as intentions do not have a completely objective definition. So, in contrast to the many cases with possible entrapment that have and are still going through the trial process, the Hasan case is a stark example of when the FBI may not have done enough to stop a suspected extremist.

14. Conclusions

Although Hasan's case is generally different from most of the other cases of terrorism in the United States since September 11, it can be easily related to the case of Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad (Case 26). Muhammad used a semiautomatic assault rifle to kill an army recruiter and wound another outside an Army recruiting center in Little Rock, Arkansas, on June 1, 2009. Like Hasan, Muhammad was born in America and was raised as an average citizen and he had been investigated by the FBI prior to the incident. Muhammad was also a loner both in life and in his attack of the army recruiters. Also, his intended targets were those involved directly in the military as he was disgruntled with the military's involvement in the Middle East, as has been suggested about Hasan. Both men were also isolated even within the Muslim community and neither have clear and distinct ties to a specific terrorist organization.⁵⁴ Other than the Muhammad case, Hasan's case is very different from other cases in that he was successful, in that he carried out the attack completely alone, and in that he was able to avoid FBI detection by having minimal connections to larger terrorist networks.

There are many lessons that can be learned from the Fort Hood shooting. First, it is important for the FBI to find the right balance between avoiding cases of entrapment and failing to catch terrorists with the actual intent to cause harm. Second, the United States may want to consider its foreign involvement and policy as reasons why terrorist attacks continue to occur, instead of assuming terrorists hate Americans as people. And third, Hasan provides an excellent example of a seemingly successful man who may contradict popular notions of terrorists and this must be taken into consideration when looking for other potential terrorists. Overall, Major Hasan provides an excellent case study for government officials to examine and scrutinize to prevent further devastating attacks in the future.

⁵³ Brian M. Jenkins, *Would-Be Warriors: Incidents of Jihadist Terrorist Radicalization in the United States since September 11, 2001*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010.

⁵⁴ "2009 Little Rock Recruiting Office Shooting," Wikipedia, accessed December 3, 2010.