

**Homegrown Terrorism¹²³:
South Korea's Next Challenge against Terrorism**
by Steve S. Sin

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With over 22,000 American service members stationed in the ROK, the USFK is known more for its role as a symbol of the US commitment to the defense of the ROK against North Korean aggression than its role as a partner in the ROK's fight against terrorism. Many who study terrorism even have the attitude, "Does Korea even have an issue with terrorism?" Perspectives as a person who has served recently in the USFK analyzing terrorism and force protection issues is that the possibility of terrorism is a reality in the ROK. This article will put forth an argument that while the ROK to date has not suffered any known incident of "homegrown" Islamic-inspired terrorism, many if not all of the necessary pre-conditions are already well established. With this awareness, the ROK must develop and implement a coherent program with two key elements: increased vigilance, and palliative outreach measures to potential malefactors, their families and, to the extent that a coherent community exists, its leaders.

The ROK is neither immune from nor unfamiliar with acts of terrorism. It has dealt with numerous terrorist acts since its inception in 1948, including attacks against its citizens in foreign countries. The most common types of terrorist tactics used against ROK interests have included bombing, shooting, hijacking, and kidnapping. To date, North Korea was responsible for almost all terrorism-related events against the ROK within and outside of its borders (Koerner 2003 and Fischer 2007).

Traditionally focused on potential terrorism from the North, the ROK government has for the last few years been shifting its attention to possible acts of terror from beyond the Korean Peninsula. Reflecting this shift, the MOFAT appointed the first Director for International Counter-terrorism Cooperation in February 2006 (Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism 2007, Ch 2).

The ROK has yet to experience terrorism within its borders where North Korea is not the primary actor. It has not, however, escaped numerous threats and warnings from Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, some known or suspected of association with Al-Qaeda (4) and acts of terrorism carried out against its citizens abroad, such as the kidnapping of 23 Christian missionaries in Afghanistan in 2007 and the beheading of Kim Sun-Il in Iraq in 2004 are the two most recent incidents.

In an effort to better address the issues of terrorism, both abroad and domestically, the ROK military, law enforcement, and government agencies have been cooperating closely with the USFK. The USFK has a robust Force Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Counter-terrorism programs to protect both the US service members and families stationed in Korea and the US interests in the region. These programs also assist the ROK partners prepare for the possibilities of terrorism in Korea and to fight and defeat any terrorist activity against the ROK interests on and off the Korean Peninsula. Cooperation between the USFK and the ROK military during the hostage crisis in Afghanistan in 2007 was a prime example.

Unremarkable Residents of Community.

The concept of homegrown terrorism is not new; however, it does depart from the conventional terrorism models where the terrorists are of foreign origins. In these conventional models, a terrorist organization located in a foreign country would dispatch a team of operatives to conduct an initial assessment of the possible target areas. Once the assessment is completed, and the conditions are set for an attack, a different team of operatives would enter the target area from overseas to carry out the attack (attack may or may

not be a suicide mission). Assuming the attack was not a suicide mission, the operatives would then ex-filtrate the area.

With the homegrown terrorism model, however, terrorists are usually local residents of the target area who are living ordinary lives as members of their community. They don't have criminal histories, and they do not always exhibit extremist behaviors. Homegrown terrorist cells are generally composed of young, 1.5th-, second- and third-generation immigrants. These cells may or may not have an ideological affiliation with large terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda, and generally operate with total autonomy.

Madrid train bombing, Amsterdam's Hofstad Group, London subway and bus bombings, Australia's Operation Pendennis, and the Toronto 18 cases are all notable homegrown terrorism cases that have occurred throughout the world. The United States has had its share of attempted homegrown terrorism as seen in the Fort Dix case of 2007 and the Sears Tower case of 2006. The threat of homegrown terrorism is real and it is a problem that every nation-state has to face and deal with today and for the foreseeable future.

Ideology and Radicalization.

Terrorism experts point out that youth, unemployment, feelings of alienation, a longing to feel self-important, and a need to be part of a group are some of the major qualities that individuals who are likely to adopt a terrorist ideology have in common. They also observe that religion can be compelling to such individuals, and they are prone to exploitation by radical religious leaders (Kaplan 2007).

Therefore, religious ideology and radicalization play a major role for the would-be terrorists. In the West, and to most extent in Northeast Asia, the phenomenon of radicalization occurs largely because the people are looking for an identity and sense of belonging – unfortunately, identity and sense of belonging are sometimes found in extremist Islam.

The ideology responsible for driving the radicalization and motivates young men and women to carry out self-guided jihad-inspired terrorism against their host countries is the jihadi-Salafism (5). This ideology inspired all or nearly all of the homegrown groups in the West including those mentioned earlier in this paper.

Terrorism is the ultimate consequence of the radicalization process (6) and it is composed of four phases: 1) Pre-radicalization; 2) Self-identification; 3) Indoctrination; and 4) Jihadization. Each phase has unique and specific signatures and individuals who undergo the process do not necessarily follow a sequential progression. It is important to note that not all individuals who begin the radicalization process necessarily complete it – most, in fact, abandon the process. If an individual does pass through the entire process, however, it is quite likely he will get involved in terrorism.

There is no set timeline for the radicalization process. The homegrown terrorism cases the New York Police Department studied shows each homegrown group underwent the process at different speeds and for different length of time – the shortest being approximately four years and the longest being approximately 13 years (*See Chart 1*).

One of the critical parts of the radicalization process is the effect of the radicalization catalysts. The catalysts can be found in different, seemingly benign, venues such as cafes, restaurants, grocery stores, flophouses, student associations, non-governmental organizations, bookstores, and even mosques. These locations provide meeting places and haunts for like-minded individuals who have chosen to pursue radicalization as they move through the process.

One of the radicalization catalysts that cannot be overlooked today is the internet. The internet, with its thousands of extremist websites and chat-rooms, serves as the virtual venue. In fact, many of the would-be extremists begin their process while researching or just surfing on the internet. As individuals progress through the various stages of radicalization, their use of the internet evolves. In the *self-identification phase*, the internet serves as

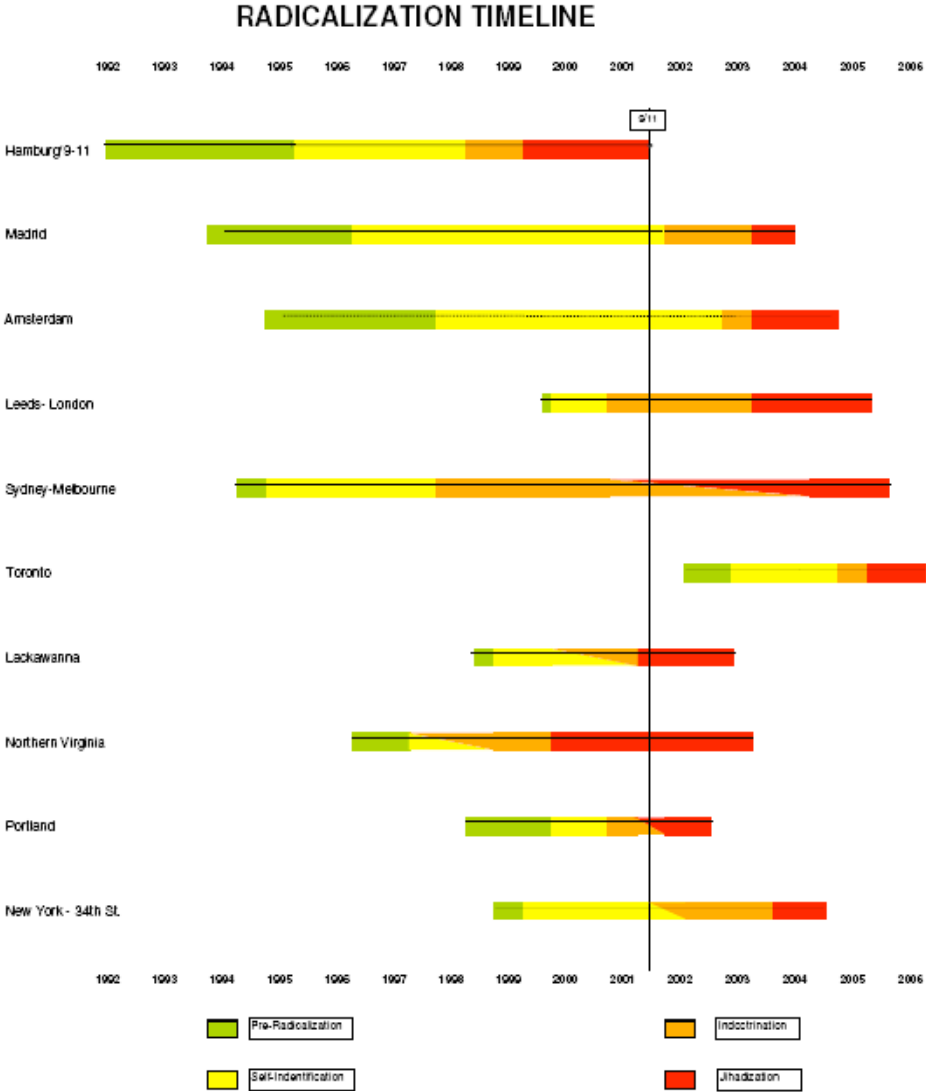


Chart 1. (Source: Mitchell and Bhatt 2007, 81)

the person's source of information about Islam and venue to meet others online. With the aggressive proliferation of the jihadi-Salafi ideology online, it is nearly impossible for someone to avoid this extreme interpretation of Islam. During the *indoctrination phase*, individuals devote their time tapping into the virtual networks of like-minded individuals around the world via extremist sites and chat rooms who reinforce the individual's beliefs and commitment and further legitimize them. In the *Jihadization phase*, people challenge and encourage each others for action.

It is at this stage, the internet becomes a resource for obtaining instructions on constructing weapons, gathering information on potential targets, and providing spiritual justification for an attack (Mitchell and Bhatt 2007, 82, 16, 19, 81, 20, 37).

Emergence of the ROK as a Regional and International Power.

The ROK had one of the fastest economic developments in the world since the 1960s and is now one of the four largest economies in Asia and the 13th largest economy in the world. In the late 20th century, many people referred to the ROK as a *newly industrialized country* and an *Asian Tiger* due to its rapid economic growth. Today, the ROK ranks among the *G20* industrial nations and is a *Next Eleven* nation with many developing countries referring to its economic success as the *Miracle on the Han River*, using the ROK's success story as a role model. The ROK has a "High" HDI of 0.912 and is part of both the CIA and IMF lists of advanced economies, being defined as a *High Income Nation* by the World Bank (IMF 2007).

The ROK is one of the world's most technologically and scientifically advanced countries; it is the only country in the world with nationwide 100Mbit/s broadband internet access, full HDTV broadcasting, DMB, WiBro and 3G HSDPA. It is currently the most wired nation in the world, with more than 90 per cent of all homes connected to high speed broadband internet. The ROK is a global leader in electronics, computers, digital displays, semiconductor devices, mobile phones, and hi-tech gadgets, headed by the two chaebols (i.e., conglomerates), Samsung and LG. South

Korea also boasts the world's 3rd largest steel producer, POSCO and is the 5th largest automobile manufacturing nation, headed by Hyundai-Kia Automotive Group. South Korea is the world's largest shipbuilder, led by several multinational corporations such as Hyundai Heavy Industries and Samsung Heavy Industries. Other important industries of South Korea include robotics and biotechnology, with the world's second humanoid robot, EveR-1 and the world's first cloned dog, *Snuppy*.

The ROK participates in the international community in every aspect and continues to work to increase its role in regional and global political affairs. The ROK maintains diplomatic relations with approximately 170 countries. It has also been a member of the United Nations since 1991. On January 1, 2007, the ROK Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon assumed the post of UN Secretary-General. It has also developed links with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as both a member of "ASEAN Plus three" and the East Asia Summit.

To deter and fight against transnational terrorism, the ROK supports the US Global War on Terror (GWOT) and actively participates in numerous international anti-terrorism initiatives. It supported US goals in Afghanistan and maintained the third-largest foreign troop contingent in Iraq through most of 2007. Additionally, it leads a Coalition Provincial Reconstruction Team in Iraq's Irbil Province. In November 2006, the ROK joined other APEC member nations in endorsing US security initiatives on aviation security, bioterrorism and food defense, and the protection of commercial and financial sectors from abuse by proliferators of weapons of mass destruction. It also actively participates in regional training and capacity building programs. The Korean government has hosted representatives from the Middle East, Latin America, and elsewhere in Asia for training in crime prevention, criminal justice, counter-terrorism, forensic science, anti-piracy and terrorism management, prevention of money laundering, and narcotics law enforcement (Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism 2007 and 2008, Ch. 2).