

Why does an Egyptian Democracy Activist turn ISIS Suicide Bomber?



Former Beirut bureau chief for the *New York Times* Robert F Worth has an op ed in the Weekend edition of the *Wall Street Journal*, April 9-10, 2016 about the transformation of a young Egyptian secular activist into an ISIS suicide bomber, "[The Democracy Activist Who Became a Suicide Bomber](#)." He is the author of [A Rage for Order: The Middle East in Turmoil, From Tahrir Square to ISIS](#), which will be published later this month by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Worth's tag line says it all: "An idealistic young Egyptian who helped lead the Tahrir Square protests died three years later in Iraq as an Islamic State jihadist." The answer is contained in another new book, [Defeating Jihad: a winnable war](#) by Dr. Sebastian Gorka that we reviewed in the current April 2016 edition of the NER, "[Freedom is Precious and Fragile](#)".

Here are excerpts from Worth's *WSJ* opinion piece:

Five years ago, Ahmad Darrawi was one of the idealistic young Egyptians whose bravery stirred world-wide admiration. In 2011, he stood among the protest vanguard in [Cairo's Tahrir Square](#), and in the months afterward he often appeared on TV, outlining reforms for [Egypt's brutal and corrupt police](#). In the fall of 2011, he ran for parliament as an independent. His campaign ads showed a smiling, clean-shaven man in a gray suit under the slogan "Dignity and Security." He was 32.

Three years later, Darrawi blew himself up on the battlefields of Iraq, where he was fighting as a loyal soldier of Islamic State, according to the terrorist

group.

How did it happen? How did a hopeful, principled young man from a middle-class family turn into a coldblooded suicide bomber? It is hard to separate that question from the Arab world's broader descent over the past five years: from nonviolence to mass murder, from proclamations of tolerance and civic idealism to the savagery of Islamic State.

[...]

Darrawi's death in 2014 ramified across Egyptian protest circles because, as one of his friends from Tahrir Square told me, "If it could happen to him, it could happen to anyone." Darrawi didn't just participate in the Tahrir Square protests; he was a leader, a member of the elite known as the Coalition of Revolutionary Youth. He stood out there because he had firsthand experience with the Egyptian police, having served briefly as an officer years earlier. (He quit in disgust, he said, after witnessing corruption and torture.)

[...]

Darrawi didn't support the ascendant Muslim Brotherhood, which [won the presidency](#) in a June 2012 election. He viewed the Islamist group as another gaggle of tired old men. By late 2012, Egypt appeared to be sliding toward civil war, and Darrawi became disgusted. He told his brother that the revolution was over. Darrawi grew depressed. By the time the Egyptian military ousted Egypt's elected Islamist president [in a coup](#) in the summer of 2013, Darrawi appeared almost catatonic, his friends said. That July, he disappeared.

A few months later, Darrawi posted a video on his new [Twitter](#) feed, which would remain unknown to his friends and family until the following year. The video showed a

dozen rebel fighters sitting around a campfire in the woods of northwestern Syria, singing songs and hunched together against the cold. You can hear the wind shuddering in the microphone as they lean toward the fire for warmth, blankets wrapped around their bodies. Cigarette-ends glow orange and then fade out. The men's eyes gleam as they sing in Arabic, raggedly but in unison:

How beautiful is the sound of guns echoing in the desert

We don't part from our grenades

The moon and stars are our witnesses

And the wilderness sings of our glory.

Darrawi, who shot the video, was now military commander of a small rebel brigade in Syria, the Lions of the Caliphate, which had just sworn its loyalty to Islamic State. Already, he was a passionate convert to the jihadist cause, and he frequently compared its cohesiveness to the toxic divisions of his native Egypt. "Once when we were sitting down to dinner, I noticed that there were more than 18 nationalities among us," he wrote at one point. "God is the only force and purpose that can unite all these people and create harmony between them."

At the time, the sudden influx of [foreign fighters](#) was transforming the Syrian conflict—and turning Islamic State into one of the most powerful terrorist groups in history. But on Twitter, Darrawi said time and again that it wasn't battle but the promise of an ideal community that inspired him. "Some wonder about all this love and sense of belonging to the Islamic State," he wrote a few months later. "My brothers, it's an old lost dream since the fall of the caliphate. And we will make it come true and pass it on, even if only through our mutilated bodies, to a new generation."

Darrawi wrote his last tweet in March 2014. About two months later, his brother received an anonymous call from a man who called himself a holy warrior, saying that “Abu Mouaz al-Masri”—Darrawi’s nom de guerre—had blown himself up in a suicide bombing. In a subsequent email, Darrawi’s brother was told that the bombing had occurred in Iraq. When Darrawi’s brother emailed to ask for more details and a death certificate, he was told there would be none.



Dr. Gorka in *Defeating Jihad* deftly explains why ISIS is so attractive to compel young Muslims, whether in Cairo or émigrés in Brussels, to join ISIS and sacrifice their lives at shahids in the way of Allah, jihad. We wrote in our NER review of Gorka’s book:

Gorka stuns the reader by revealing what is so compelling a message for tens of thousands of Jihadis to flock to the Caliphate. The lands it occupies in Al Shaam in Syria and Iraq are the mythic Islamist end times venue for the final holy war against the hated kuffars, infidels. That coupled with the adept social media in the *Debiq Magazine* and the slickly produced graphic videos depicting terror acts of beheadings, crucifixions and burnings communicate the end times of the only war that counts to conquer the world in the way of Allah, Jihad.

Caliph Abu Bakr al Baghdadi by declaring the Caliphate on the lands of the final war for Islamic victory in its end-times vision attracted fundamentalists who lamented the loss of the last Caliphate with the end of the Ottoman Empire.

Gorka demonstrates how compelling that has been for US jihadists:

Of the ISIS terrorists arrested or interdicted inside America since the Islamic State was declared, just over

half had sworn *bayat* (fealty) to the new Caliphate and were preparing to leave the country to fight for ISIS in the Middle East. Of the rest, 19 percent were acting as talent-sporters or facilitators, like those management-level terrorists who vetted the young men and bought them their plane tickets to Turkey so they could cross into Syria to fight for the new empire. Most shocking of all, 29 percent of the ISIS supporters caught or killed in the United States saw no need to go anywhere to become a jihadi.

Gorka's warning about the threat of ISIS to the US and the West:

ISIS and the broader global jihadist movement pose an existential threat to the United States because they are based upon the inherently undemocratic ideology of *takfiri jihad*, which denies that Western democracy and *Islam* can peacefully coexist. One must destroy the other. The *jihadists* can never be our partner, only a deadly foe. They are not interested in peace or stability, because they see their mandate as universal and unstoppable. According to *Abu Bakr and his Islamic State*, all the people in the world must eventually live under *the Islamic caliphate*. The further spread of *Jihadism* must be stopped, and the ideology must be undermined from within.