

Chesser Network

OVERVIEW

The mapping of links among Zachary Chesser and Revolution Muslim, the organization of which Chesser was a significant part, reveals a complex environment of interaction that might not be evident upon first glance or the exclusive study of written material. A Social Network Analysis (SNA) identifies Chesser, Revolution Muslim, al-Shabaab, and Younes Abdullah Muhammad (a.k.a. Jesse Curtis Morton) as key nodes in the link chart with regards to information and/or extremist activity and resources. These key nodes and their significance are explained below.

KEY NODES AND SIGNIFICANCE

Zachary Chesser is obviously of great importance to the network. He was connected in some way to all other nodes, which allowed him an excellent view of the network as a whole and gave him the ability to access more information through the network “grapevine.” Chesser acted as both an authority and a hub, receiving and directing, respectively, a great deal of information and activity.

Revolution Muslim acts in the network as a means of expression for those believing in extremist views and desiring to act upon them and/or actively support such views. It was also a means of communication and recruitment for those involved in Revolution Muslim, allowing members to communicate quickly and easily, as well as reach out to potential recruits and assets.

Al-Shabaab has multiple links within the network – to Chesser himself, but also to others with whom Chesser is directly connected and to people that are at most only one-step removed from members of Revolution Muslim.

Younes Abdullah Muhammad (a.k.a. Jesse Curtis Morton) co-founded and led Revolution Muslim for a time and, as a result, was a central node in the network. He was well-connected to numerous other nodes, allowing him an excellent view of the network as a whole and the ability to access a great deal of information and direct considerable activity. Younes Abdullah Muhammad acted as both an authority and a hub, receiving and directing, respectively, information and activity.

Finally, although **Anwar al-Awlaki** was not ranked as highly in the SNA as the above four entities, he is an important node to consider since he (and/or his work) exerted a great deal of influence over people within the network, including Chesser himself.

DISCUSSION

Perhaps the greatest piece of information gleaned from reviewing the mapped Chesser network is the degree to which the Internet (particularly the Web site of Revolution Muslim) was a link between numerous actors and a medium for movement-building, communication, and action. The implications of this fact are serious and should be further proof of the need to continue to include cyber and social network analyses in any investigation into terrorist activity.

RESEARCHERS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

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