



John Walker Lindh, American Taliban

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Lindh is only one of about 300 homegrown violent extremists scheduled for release in the next few years, and the intelligence community is highly concerned about their potential for recidivism.

Among the myriad of news stories in the aftermath of 9/11, **one** of the oddest was 17-year-old John Walker Lindh, dubbed the “American Taliban,” who was captured in Afghanistan among a band of Taliban fighters.

I **reported** on **Lindh** back in November 2001. As soon as the news hit that an American teenager belonged to an Al Qaeda terrorist group fighting against U.S. forces, my editor sent me to Marin County, an affluent neighborhood north of San Francisco, to report on his improbable journey.

I spent a week talking to Lindh’s former neighbors, teachers, and fellow students, most of whom remembered him as quiet and withdrawn. I found two mosques where he had studied and prayed, and the mullahs spoke glowingly of his enthusiasm and serious devotion to the Quran. Lindh clearly had found some meaning in his life. His father, Frank Lindh, an attorney, supported his son’s conversion and financed his travel to the Middle East.

Lindh later **told** FBI investigators that he converted from Catholicism to Islam in 1998 after reading the novel Malcolm X, and traveled to Yemen to immerse himself in Islamic culture and learn Arabic. He then went to Pakistan, where he spent seven weeks training with Taliban militants and al Qaeda volunteers for combat and terrorist attacks. Osama bin Laden personally thanked him for being part of the jihad.

Shortly before the 9/11 attacks, Lindh **made his way** to Afghanistan. Three months later, he was found among a band of surrendering Taliban fighters, carrying an AK-47 rifle. Just hours after his interrogation by U.S. officials, the captured Taliban staged a revolt that ended in a shootout, killing 500 combatants and one CIA officer. Lindh was shot in his leg during the uprising, given medical treatment and sent back to the U.S. to face trial.

After **pleading guilty** to supporting the Taliban and carrying weapons in Afghanistan, he was sentenced to 20 years in a high-security penitentiary in California. In May 2019, he is eligible for release, (with three years off for good behavior.)

Does Lindh, now 36, feel contrite?

Apparently not, according to a **National Counterterrorism Center (NCC) report**, which says that Lindh “continues to advocate for global jihad and to write and translate violent extremist texts.” In 2010, Lindh successfully sued the prison to lift restrictions on group prayer. Documents also show that he told a visiting news crew that he has not renounced extreme violence.

Frank Lindh continues to support his son, and in a **letter** to a newspaper claims he was “an innocent victim in the war on terror,” and that he went to Afghanistan because his “instinct was to help [the suffering Moslems.]”

Lindh is only one of about 300 homegrown violent extremists scheduled for release in the next few years, and the intelligence community is highly **concerned** about their potential for recidivism.

At least 90 of them “will probably reengage in terrorist activity,” **says** the NCC.



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