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**THE HOMEGROWN JIHADI TERRORIST:
THE THREAT OF ISIS-INSPIRED RADICALIZATION
IN THE UNITED STATES**

by

Marcelle R. Burroni

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Thesis Advisor:

Co-Advisor:

Second Reader:

Sean F. Everton

Craig A. Whiteside

Robert E. Burks

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RADICALIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES**

Marcelle R. Burroni
Major, United States Army
BS, Wayland Baptist University, 2006
MPA, Wayland Baptist University, 2010

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
September 2018**

Approved by: Sean F. Everton
Advisor

Craig A. Whiteside
Co-Advisor

Robert E. Burks
Second Reader

John J. Arquilla
Chair, Department of Defense Analysis

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ABSTRACT

As this study establishes, the influence of Islamist extremists has expanded into the United States. The terrorist organization known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has attracted many U.S. citizens to support its radical perspective of Islam. The ultimate goal of ISIS is to rule the Muslim world. Although establishing a caliphate or unleashing holy war on U.S. soil is clearly not in ISIS's immediate plans, its current goal is to recruit as many American supporters as possible. Since ISIS's declaration of its caliphate, American citizens have supported ISIS by attempting to become foreign fighters, soliciting jihadist material online, or plotting attacks in the United States. Homegrown jihadi terrorist ideology thus poses a threat, due to its inherently violent Islamic extremism. This threat needs to be defeated by a comprehensive approach that ensures the safety and security of the United States.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CVE	Counter violence extremism
CVETF	Countering Violent Extremism Task Force
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOD	Department of Defense
DOJ	Department of Justice
DOS	Department of State
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
HVEs	Homegrown violent extremists
HGT	Homegrown terrorists
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
JTTFs	Joint terrorism task forces
NCTC	National Counterterrorism Center
SNA	Social network analysis
SIP	Strategic Implementation Plan
USG	United States government

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The threat of terrorism born of radicalization is a critical issue that challenges the world today, and homegrown Islamic terrorists who become foreign fighters pose a substantial threat to our national security. The conflict in Syria and Iraq has attracted Western extremists eager to wage battle and violence against the United States. Although their number is minimal compared to the number of European Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) recruits, they remain a security concern that the government must resolve.

Some theorists argue that the domestic terrorist threat is not a significant issue and that it arises due only the public's fear of a perceived, albeit exaggerated, risk that underscores the problem. However, others see the threat as real and agree with terrorism experts, such as Will McCants, Peter Bergen, and Bruce Hoffman, that radicalization, and recruitment of ISIS supporters in the United States are on the rise and that attacks are becoming concurrently more complicated to prevent due to the diversification and evolution of the threat.¹

This thesis looks at the increase in the number of U.S. homegrown ISIS-inspired terrorists from 2014 to 2017. Estimates indicate that more than 250 Americans became foreign fighters in that period. Furthermore, over 161 have been arrested and convicted of being ISIS supporters,² and currently, there are approximately 900 active investigations of individuals that may be ISIS supporters in the United States.³ This thesis reviews research using court records and open-source information to analyze ISIS radicalization and recruitment in the United States. It endeavors to explain the possible patterns of who supports ISIS, pledges an oath to it, and why.

¹ William F. McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016); J. M. Bergen *Jihad Joe: Americans Who Go to War in the Name of Islam* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2011); Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, rev. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

² "The Cases Program on Extremism," George Washington University, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/cases>.

³ Bergen et al., *Jihadist Terrorism 16 Years after 9/11: A Threat Assessment* (Washington, DC: New America, 2017).

The threat from homegrown and lone-wolf terrorism has increased since ISIS's declaration of the caliphate. According to a joint study conducted from 2006 to 2016 by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, homegrown Islamic extremism was not a threat.⁴ Though white supremacists have killed more citizens in the United States,⁵ the increased of homegrown Islamic terrorists who are also U.S. citizens supporting the ISIS terrorist organization has taken on a new urgency because of past conflicts, existing networks, religious obligations, and the influence of social media.

This thesis reviews the specifics of U.S. citizen foreign fighters and domestic supporters of ISIS. It uses a research design methodology that includes historical analysis, social network analysis, and presents a game-theory model on the significance of funding needed to abate domestic terrorism.

Additionally, this thesis examines the globalization of the ISIS ideology, which has resulted in radicalization and mobilization in the United States. The notion of Americans declaring *bayah*, the religiously binding oath of loyalty to ISIS,⁶ poses significant issues to national security. This study seeks to diagnose the current outbreak of homegrown Islamic extremists who support ISIS and to identify the underlying reasons Americans become jihadists. Here are questions this thesis considers when exploring why American citizens would support the ISIS terrorist group: What is the appeal that lures Americans to embrace ISIS propaganda? What seduces them to follow such a radical ideology? Is it possible to recognize different triggers between someone who wants to flee America and someone who wants to plot a violent incident on American soil?

In this thesis, the term "homegrown terrorism" describes the terrorist activity and plots U.S. citizens, and legal residents have planned. The term "jihadist" describes a radicalized individual who believes the extreme Islamic ideology justifying a holy war

⁴ Lisa Monaco, "Preventing the Next Attack," *Foreign Affairs*, December 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2017-10-16/preventing-next-attack>.

⁵ Monaco, "Preventing the Next Attack."

⁶ Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror* (New York: Ecco Press, 2016). Bayah is a religiously binding oath of loyalty.

against Muslims and non-Muslims. Finally, the term “violent Islamist extremism” refers to an ideology that seeks to impose a radical version of Islamic law and endorses the use of violence against all perceived opponents, whether Muslims or non-Muslims.

This thesis describes homegrown terrorists who are foreign fighters, the plots and attacks they have planned, and the rise of this occurrence in the United States since the appearance of ISIS. It analyzes domestic jihadist terrorism after ISIS declared the caliphate in 2014, along with what additional efforts the United States government, law enforcement, and the Intelligence Community must consider how to minimize this specific threat of domestic terrorism effectively. ISIS recruiters make it simple for citizens to support ISIS and encourage them to travel abroad to join ISIS and fight in jihad. Moreover, ISIS recruiters not only possess sophisticated skills and techniques, but they also use the English language to lure in potential candidates into the organization. In 2015, ISIS distributed a publication titled *Hijrah to the Islamic State*, which provides detailed information regarding travel to an international safe haven by giving how-to tips on routes, border security, and passports. Also in 2015, it released another publication titled *How to Survive in the West*, which informs recruits how to contact and communicate with ISIS members and the information needed to avoid law enforcement detection.⁷

This thesis examines the radicalization trajectories of individuals who support and are motivated by ISIS jihadist ideology in the United States. The data in this thesis is gathered mostly from various authors and researchers from the New America International Security program *Terrorism in America After 9/11*, which provides information on homegrown terrorist activity and Islamic extremism in the United States.⁸ The study provides an overview of homegrown terrorism from 2014 to 2017 and examines the threat it poses to the nation. Additional sources include the George Washington University Program on Extremism publications *ISIS in America, Fear Thy Neighbor: Radicalization and Jihadist Attacks in the West*, and *The Travelers: American Jihadists in Syria and Iraq*,

⁷ Homeland Security Committee, *Final Report of the Task Force on Combating Terrorist and Foreign Fighter Travel* (Washington, DC: Homeland Security Committee, 2015), <https://homeland.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/TaskForceFinalReport.pdf>.

⁸ Peter Bergen et al., *Terrorism in American after 9/11* (Washington, DC: New America 2016), <https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/terrorism-in-america/>.

as well as its monthly extremism tracker. These reports provide firsthand analysis of the threat posed to the United States by ISIS and offer a detailed examination of Americans who have joined and acted on behalf of ISIS.

This thesis supports the position that U.S. government officials need to consider practical approaches to combating American jihadists with policies that implement security-related countermeasures and take steps toward further research to increase deradicalization efforts. These measures should include intelligence and information sharing, community outreach initiatives, a national counter-messaging campaign, and enhanced law enforcement strategies. Terrorism will never be entirely eradicated, and prevention of all potential attacks is impossible regardless of available resources. Even so, the threat to the United States of America is real and persistent. The ability to defeat and prevent jihadi extremism as well as homegrown terrorism requires long-term policies that eliminate the physical battlefield and its fighters and, more importantly, destabilizes the use of violence. The United States faces a complicated situation when addressing policies to mitigate jihadi movements because the lessons learned over the past three decades indicate terrorism cannot be destroyed and dismantled solely through military means.

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I. HISTORY OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

There is no excuse for any Muslim not to migrate to the Islamic State... joining [its fight] is a duty on every Muslim. We are calling on you either to join or carry weapons [to fight] wherever you are. Islam was never a religion of peace. Islam is the religion of fighting. No-one should believe that the war that we are waging is the war of the Islamic State. It is the war of all Muslims, but the Islamic State is spearheading it. It is the war of Muslims against infidels.

—Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi¹

To understand the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), we need to take a look back at essential milestones in Islamic history and Islamist radicalism. In this chapter, I introduce important concepts central to understanding ISIS. Next, I provide an overview of the struggle within the Islam faith and how the Prophet Muhammad spread Islam throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Additionally, a review of contemporary history highlights how the self-proclaimed caliphate of ISIS, armed with its sectarian and extreme ideology, has advanced through a massive amount of territory in Iraq and Syria. ISIS's unique variation of Islam of Salafi jihadist ideology causes controversial issues among Muslims and continues to affect Islam dramatically today because of its extreme ideology. This chapter also discusses how Muslim countries have seen an escalation in jihadist organizations because of civil wars, past conflicts, and foreign interventions—all of which affect the present-day homegrown terrorism threat in the United States. Also, I review how ISIS has inspired supporters through its keen recruitment techniques as well as its goal to rule all Muslims under strict Islamic sharia law. This chapter concludes by discussing national security and domestic terrorism issues, concerns, and policies.

A. THE STRUGGLE WITHIN THE ISLAM FAITH

Starting in about 610 CE, after proclaiming revelations from the angel Gabriel, the Prophet Muhammad spread Islam throughout the Arabian Peninsula; Muslims consider

¹ Frank Gardner, "Islamic State Releases 'Al-Baghdadi Message,'" *BBC News*, May 14, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32744070>.

him to be the messenger who founded Islam and its perfect embodiment.² When the Prophet died, Islam was expanding, and there was an extensive, active Islamic community in the region of Arabia. Three groups emerged from this growth: the Ansars, known as the “helpers” because they helped the Prophet during battles against the Meccans; the Muhajirs, known as the “migrants;” the earliest followers of Muhammad and the Meccans who had been the enemies of the Prophet Muhammad but later converted and embraced Islam.³

Prophet Muhammad was central to the original Muslim community, and after his death, a critical issue the Muslim community had to address was who was to be his successor. There was not one, which caused the spread of panic across the empire and resulted in numerous debates among scholars and challenges to Muslim leaders. The naming of the Prophet’s successor for leadership purposes, and the interpretation of the sacred writings were the two major challenges the Muslim community (*umma*) faced.

The differences between groups and the issue of succession led to the split of Islam into two sects, the *Sunnis*, and *Shias*. The Shias supported the leadership of the Prophet’s cousin Ali and his descendants. Many Shia movements made claims of legitimate authority during the first several decades of Islam, which resulted in three main branches of Shias, the Twelvers, the Ismailis, and the Zaydis.⁴

Regarding authority in a more orthodox manner, the Sunnis had a more political concept of who should lead the caliphate and believed that the leader should be from the Prophet’s tribe of Quraysh.⁵ Ultimately, the “rightly guided caliphs” (a term only used by Sunni)⁶ became the leaders in the *umma*. The rightly guided caliphs consisted of four men who led at different times. The first elected leader was Abu Bakr (632–634), who was the father of Aisha, wife of the Prophet and companion to Muhammad; the second, Omar (634–

² Afshon Ostovar, “Islam” (class notes, NS3300 Islam, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 2018).

³ Daniel W. Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 155.

⁴ Ostovar, “Islam.”

⁵ Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam*, 10.

⁶ Ostovar, “Islam.”

644) who was the father of Hafsa, another wife of the Prophet, and he was responsible for massive expansion and military successes; the third, Uthman (644–656) of the Umayyad clan, was also a companion of the Prophet in Mecca and married two of the Prophet’s daughters, Ruqayyah and Umm; and the last, Ali (656–661), was Muhammad’s son-in-law and the first to convert to Islam. In contrast to the Sunni, the Shias only consider Ali to be the rightful successor.⁷

To this day, the division between Shia and Sunni persists. In the Sunni system, after Ali died, the caliphate passed down from father to son and was not selected by the community. The loss of the Prophet Muhammad created a point of contention for leadership and spiritual authority in the Muslim community and religion. Many may argue this division manifested itself in political loyalties to the Prophet’s family and both Sunni and Shia theology and jurisprudence took on distinctive characteristics.

The Quran is the holy book of Islam and the foundation of Muslim theology, beliefs, and history for both Sunni and Shia. All Muslims consider it the word of God, not the word of the Prophet Muhammad. The Quran’s central teachings are that God is one and that Muhammad is the last in the succession of Abrahamic messengers. Furthermore, the Quran is central to Islam and Islamic identity, and it provides Muslims with an understanding of theology, law, and culture. An additional source of authority is the Hadith, which are hundreds of volumes of sayings attributed to Prophet Muhammed. Muslim scholars have spent their lives seeking to reconcile misunderstandings and contradictions within these works.

B. CONTEMPORARY RADICAL HISTORY

Since 2014, and armed with its sectarian and extreme ideology, the self-proclaimed caliphate of ISIS advanced extensively throughout Iraq and Syria. ISIS declares itself to follow the authentic form of Islam practiced in early Muslim generations. At its height, it controlled 100,000 square kilometers of territory encompassing over 11 million people in Iraq and Syria, and it collaborated with other militant networks to add provinces in Libya,

⁷ Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam*, 22.

Egypt, Nigeria, and Afghanistan.⁸ Additionally, it has claimed ungoverned spaces in Saudi Arabia, Algeria, the Caucasus, and established networks with jihadists pledging their loyalty in Somalia, the Philippines, Turkey, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mali, and Tunisia.⁹ ISIS was formed with tens of thousands of global supporters. In comparison, it has attracted more followers than the supporters and fighters of the mujahedeen against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s or those that joined al-Qaeda's training camps.¹⁰

ISIS supporters come from various circumstances. Some believe they were heading for utopia and preferred living among true Muslims instead of being surrounded by infidels, or nonbelievers. Others think it is part of the grand and final battle between Muslims and non-Muslims and feel this is their call to duty, and others want the adventure along with the adrenaline of combat training and battlefield experience.¹¹ At its peak, ISIS had expanded and performed its organizational and military operations with success. In building its empire, it has emulated the knowledge and philosophy of Chinese leader Mao Zedong, and ISIS's ability to prepare for the battlefield and its ability to conduct guerrilla attacks and conventional military operations produced initial results beyond any expectation of the United States and the European Union.¹²

ISIS's primary goals was to expand its territory, increase its capabilities with structure and governance. The group's focus is to motivate recruits by inspiring them in a tainted misconception of Islam. Intimidation tactics using barbarism have also been vital in the ISIS campaign. ISIS's rapes, murders, beheadings, and enslavements have become legendary, as has its capture of children for purposes of sexual slavery and trafficking. This savage group has also buried and burned people alive.

⁸ Seth Jones et al., *Rolling Back the Islamic State*, RR-1912 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2017), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1912.html.

⁹ Jones et al., *Rolling Back the Islamic State*.

¹⁰ George Friedman and Jacob L. Shapiro, "A Short History of the Islamic State," *Geopolitics Futures*, February 12, 2018, <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/short-history-islamic-state>.

¹¹ Friedman and Shapiro, "A Short History of the Islamic State."

¹² Daniel Byman, "Understanding the Islamic State: A Review Essay," *MIT Press* 40, no. 4 (Spring 2016): 127–165, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/617463>.

ISIS has its origins in al-Qaeda in Iraq.¹³ Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian militant, initially formed and founded ISIS in 1999. In 2002, al-Zarqawi led an insurgency in Iraq against U.S. forces, and by 2003, after the U.S. intervention in Iraq, his group began to grow. His ideology was exhibited through ruthless sectarian massacres.¹⁴ In 2006, al-Zarqawi was killed, but his teachings and extreme doctrine continued to impact the Muslim community. As Robin Wright notes, “whereas al-Qaeda promoted a unified Islamic front against the West, al-Qaeda in Iraq prioritized killing Shiites and others it considered apostate Muslims who deserved death.”¹⁵ Al-Zarqawi’s bond with Osama Bin Laden and his dedication to al-Qaeda bequeathed him a high status of credibility and prominence among jihadists. Following his death, Abu Ayyub al-Masri briefly became his successor. Abu Umar al Baghdadi was appointed emir of the new Islamic State of Iraq in October 2006 (four months later) and became the more permanent successor to Zarqawi. Hamza (Masri) was appointed his war minister. Much of this had to do with Omar being an Iraqi and Masri an Egyptian in an organization dominated by Iraqis.¹⁶

In 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi publicly appeared and made a declaration of a caliphate among the Salafi jihadist Muslims worldwide.¹⁷ However, before this appearance he was active in Syria in 2012–2013, issuing statements as emir of ISIS. His 2014 mosque appearance was scheduled to celebrate the attainment of the caliphate at long last. Moreover, he is the ISIS leader, caliph, and self-declared leader of all Muslims. In his July 2014 speech, he explained the Muslim community’s obligation to revitalize the caliphate and establish its prominence. (The last previous legitimate caliphate was the Turkish secularist Kemal Ataturk, who abolished the Ottoman Empire 90 years ago.)¹⁸ Al-Baghdadi claimed dominion over the entire Muslim world, and he created ISIS to evolve

¹³ Robin Wright, *The Jihadi Threat: ISIS, Al Qaeda and Beyond* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2016), <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/The-Jihadi-Threat-ISIS-Al-Qaeda-and-Beyond.pdf>.

¹⁴ Wright, *The Jihadi Threat*.

¹⁵ Wright.

¹⁶ Barbara F. Walter, “The Extremist’s Advantage in Civil Wars,” *International Security* 42, no. 2 (November 2017): 7–39, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00292.

¹⁷ Friedman and Shapiro, “A Short History of the Islamic State.”

¹⁸ Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants.”

into an established system that operated as a structured government that institutionalizes systems.

During its peak in occupation, ISIS had a functioning military, legal and court systems, along with social services and functioning schools.¹⁹ Additionally, ISIS created a publishing house that produced literature for its followers that included textbooks for students and, of course, propaganda.²⁰ Ultimately, ISIS intends to govern under extreme Islamist jihad law to defend Sunni Muslims and create a world for them governed by its interpretation of true Islamic law. It has led a crusade wherein it convinces people that this is the apocalypse and that the Islamic prophecies are coming to fruition; doomsday is here. The message of ISIS is that the final battle against the infidels is taking place now, and all true Muslims will answer the call and wage war in honor of Allah; it is the “great battle.”²¹

Initially, the declaration of the caliphate created only a slight threat to U.S. citizens. However, by the end of 2016, 31,000 foreign fighters from 86 countries on five continents had left their homeland to join ISIS either in Iraq or Syria.²² From 2006 to 2014, the group underwent considerable changes and identified as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).²³ From 2007 to 2011, it engaged in constant battles with Iraqi and U.S. troops,²⁴ continued to build itself, and again changed its title in 2013 to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, which we now know as ISIS.²⁵ It had already created a splinter group in Syria, and its intended goal is to advance through acts of terrorism. By 2014, Raqqa, Syria’s provincial capital, was under total ISIS control. ISIS considers apostates to be Muslims who have violated a severe principle of Islam, such as supporting the occupation, under their reliance as *takfir*

¹⁹ Wright, *The Jihadi Threat*.

²⁰ Wright.

²¹ William F. McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2016).

²² Wright, *The Jihadi Threat*.

²³ Wright.

²⁴ Wright.

²⁵ Wright.

(a Muslim who is a non-believer).²⁶ ISIS followers adhere to strict *sharia law*,²⁷ but they over emphasize the brutal practices of this law with mass killings, stoning, and amputations of Sunni Muslims as well nonbelievers.²⁸

Many experts have studied and analyzed ISIS's considerable and rapid growth. In one project, 20 specialists from various universities and organizations across the country researched ISIS in detail. The resulting report, titled *The Jihadi Threat: ISIS, Al Qaeda and Beyond*, concluded ISIS growth in 2013 was

facilitated by six factors: new internal leadership; a series of prison breaks that grew its ranks and put hardened jihadis back on the battlefield; a campaign of assassinations and intimidation to degrade Iraqi Security Forces; chaos created by the uprising in neighboring Syria; multiple political failures by the Iraqi government; and the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq.²⁹

C. WAHHABI AND SALAFI JIHADIST IDEOLOGY

ISIS's beliefs are derived from the tenets of an ultraconservative branch of Islam known as Wahhabism, which originated on the Arabian peninsula in the 1700s. Wahhabism has profoundly impacted Islam and divided Muslims for over two centuries. During the eighteenth century, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (Sheikh Muhammed) and his followers believed their religious obligation was to spread the call (*da'wa*) to restore pure monotheistic worship and revive the authentic and original beliefs and practices of Islam.³⁰ To relate this to modern times, ISIS is the first group in centuries that has insisted on emulating that same eighteenth-century Arabian Wahhabism by reconstituting this radical practice of Islam with an extreme version of sharia law.³¹

²⁶ Apostates a person who renounces a religious or political belief or principle.

²⁷ Sharia law is the religious law forming part of the Islamic tradition.

²⁸ Wright, *The Jihadi Threat*.

²⁹ Wright.

³⁰ David D. Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

³¹ Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants."

In 1744 in al-Dir'iyya, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab settled under the clan known as al Saud and formed the Wahhabi mission.³² The al Saud expanded their influence with the “infidel” Ottomans and neighboring Muslim tribes through war and conquest. To implement Wahhabi belief structure from his interpretation of the Hadith collections, Sheikh Muhammad composed *The Book of God's Unity*, which represents the core of Wahhabism and interprets the legacy of thirteenth-century Islamic scholar Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyyah and the Hanbali school of jurisprudence. The ideological root of this form of Islam is radical because it rejects intellectual perceptions as *maqasid* (the spirit of sharia law), *kalam* (Islamic philosophy), *Sufism* (Islamic spirituality), *ilal* (the study of religious intentions in the Quran and hadith), and *al-majaz* (metaphors).³³ In 1930, Saudi Arabia established Wahhabism as the state religion, and Wahhabis view the Saudi kingdom as the legitimate Islamic government.

Sheikh Muhammad dedicated himself to the study of Islamic law and the purest forms of Islam practice. However, the deep divide between Sunni and Shia, along with the Wahhabis proclaiming other Muslims as “idolaters,” has instituted an intense hostility among the umma, which has lasted for centuries.³⁴ Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab believed that battle is necessary when the unbeliever understands the call and rejects it. Moreover, he declared those who called upon Jesus, the angels, or saints despite daily prayers or a modest lifestyle, as unbelievers because they worshiped others before God.³⁵ Wahhabi beliefs include the use of punishments, such as enslavement, beheading, and crucifixion, and execution.

Salafis are referred to as believers that adhere to the customs of original Muslim ancestors (*salaf*) or as a *muwahhid*, that is, one who professes God's unity.³⁶ Although Salafists claim a puritanical foundation, jihad and apostasy are core elements. In modern

³² Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission*.

³³ Hassan Hassan, *The Sectarianism of the Islamic State: Ideological Roots and Political Context* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016), <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/13/sectarianism-of-islamic-state-ideological-roots-and-political-context-pub-63746>.

³⁴ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission*.

³⁵ Commins.

³⁶ Commins.

times, individuals such as Osama bin Laden and the Mufti of Saudi Arabia were considered leaders of their Salafi communities.³⁷ Osama bin Laden's teaching of Salafism was monotheistic and strict in the belief that all Muslims must follow the same path as the Prophet or be considered an apostate or idolater.³⁸ Because of the judgment that jihadi Salafis declare on other Muslims, this sect in Islam is continuously criticized for its brutal treatment of fellow Muslims. Salafis argue that other Muslims practice of devotion is hindered because self-fulfillment is a threat to *tawhid* (the oneness of God)³⁹ and that following the Prophet's guidance is absolute (the *salaf*)⁴⁰ to ensure that humanity is saved from impulsiveness and lack of discipline. Their narrow interpretation opposes all forms of Sufi and Shia Islam, and it rejects all theological knowledge not discussed in the Quran. In the Salafist structure, pluralism is utterly rejected.

Some Salafis hold different interpretations of contemporary political issues, but they subscribe to the same religious jurisprudence on matters, including the belief that retaliation is acceptable against one who attacks the umma.⁴¹ However, there are three distinct and separate Salafi groups in the contemporary world: the purists who focus on nonviolence, purification, and education; the politicos follow the Salafi creed (*aqida*) to influence social justice; and the jihadists for whom violence and revolt are resolutions.⁴² Most Salafis are not jihadists, who constitute only a small minority of Salafis. However, this minority claims to act as the pious vanguard to awaken all Muslims to the truth, and this has set them far apart about their ability to influence today's Muslim world.⁴³ For example, ISIS presents the core ideology of Salafi jihadism in its return to a "pure" state of Islam via the institutionalization of the caliphate, the declaration of jihad, and their ideological stance on takfir (excommunication after one Muslim declares another an infidel

³⁷ Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (May 2006): 207–239, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500497004>.

³⁸ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission*.

³⁹ Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement."

⁴⁰ Wiktorowicz.

⁴¹ Wiktorowicz.

⁴² Wiktorowicz.

⁴³ Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam*.

or apostate).⁴⁴ ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is a self-declared Salafi jihadist that has proven he will wage war for his belief and he is justified.⁴⁵ Framing its followers' plight as entangled in conflict against the rationalists, ISIS has dramatically affected the world of Islam because of its violence toward other Muslims. In the twenty-first century, this extreme ideology is causing many unique political and religious challenges and leading to disparity, division, and debate in the Muslim community.

D. POST-SEPTEMBER 11

The U.S. awareness of radical Islamist extremism and the threat it implies dramatically increased in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.⁴⁶ The presidential administrations of both George W. Bush and Barack Obama developed strategies to reduce this threat. Today, these strategies are part of what has become known as the “the global war on terror,”⁴⁷ although the term is no longer used. Regardless, the U.S. government's efforts have been proficient in neutralizing, defeating, and degrading multiple terrorist organizations worldwide. However, despite the operational success the United States has achieved, the war on terrorism is far from the government's being able to declare victory.⁴⁸ The American-led coalition started actively bombing in September 2014 in Syria, Iraq, and assisting Iraq as part of a global campaign to defeat ISIS.⁴⁹ Concurrently, joint forces of the Syrian and Iranian forces, assisted by Russian air power, battled ISIS in western Syria.⁵⁰

In spite of these victories, the 2015 Paris attacks that killed 130 individuals, and the San Bernardino California attack in that same year, raised concerns about ISIS globally.⁵¹ By the beginning of 2016, the fear of terrorist attacks by ISIS in the United States and the

⁴⁴ Hassan, *The Sectarianism of the Islamic State*.

⁴⁵ Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants.”

⁴⁶ Lederman, “Insider Threats.”

⁴⁷ Monaco, “Preventing the Next Attack.”

⁴⁸ Peter Feaver and Hal Brands, “Trump and Terrorism: U.S. Strategy after ISIS,” *Foreign Affairs*, March–April 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2017-02-13/trump-and-terrorism>.

⁴⁹ Friedman and Shapiro, “A Short History of the Islamic State.”

⁵⁰ Friedman and Shapiro.

⁵¹ Byman, “Understanding the Islamic State.”

European Union was at its highest since 9/11. Even so, by the end of 2017, despite the continued small-arms engagements, the U.S.-led coalition had nearly eliminated ISIS's territorial control; however, its ideology and recruitment persist.⁵²

E. ISIS'S DISTINCTIVE VARIATION OF ISLAM

ISIS's ideology has been instrumental in creating a governing state and an effective strategy in military operations, which gives it both legitimacy and success in recruitment. Additionally, it has expanded its core through the monopolization of brutality and viciousness. ISIS believes its variation of Islam is the path to the "Day of Judgment."⁵³ This perception allows ISIS to be unmerciful. If one is considered a *kuffar*, or infidel, and in the Muslim holy land, true followers must kill him or her.⁵⁴ In his article "What ISIS Really Wants," Graeme Wood explains,

before the rise of the Islamic State, no group in the past few centuries had attempted more-radical fidelity to the prophetic model than the Wahhabis of 18th century Arabia, which conquered most of what is now Saudi Arabia where strict practices survive in a diluted version of Sharia law.⁵⁵

Followers of ISIS utilize the Quran or Hadith to justify their actions and say this makes them acceptable because these accord with its interpretation of sharia law. Islamic scripture is encompassed within the Quran and the Hadith, and ISIS leaders know these scriptures fluently. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISIS's caliph, holds a doctorate in Quran studies, and his top scholars are also well educated.⁵⁶ They stand proudly with their black flags that state, "*There is only one God, Allah, and the Prophet Muhammad is his Messenger.*"

With its choreographed videos and imagies, ISIS intentionally provokes the anger of both Muslims and non-Muslims. However, at the same time, it has successfully built a

⁵² Friedman and Shapiro, "A Short History of the Islamic State."

⁵³ Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic*, March 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

⁵⁴ Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants."

⁵⁵ Wood.

⁵⁶ McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*

state, recruited followers, and captured and held territory.⁵⁷ ISIS follows a *takfir* doctrine; takfir alters the status of people (from Muslims to non-Muslims), which allows specific punishments to be administered that would not usually be under sharia. This includes Shia Muslims (over approximately 200 million people are Shia), whom ISIS labels as *heretics* (ones who add false beliefs to the central faith) and other Muslims as *apostates*, meaning those who left their religion or betrayed their religion because of their different practices. According to ISIS beliefs, non-Muslims are *kuffars*, also known as *infidels* or nonbelievers.⁵⁸

F. PAST CONFLICTS—FOREIGN INTERVENTIONS

The rise of the jihadist organization in the last two decades has contributed to civil war's in Muslim countries. This environment has led to failed states, such as Iraq and Syria, whose vulnerabilities allow nonstate actors, such as jihadi groups, to operate and flourish within their borders.⁵⁹ Ungoverned territories tend to breed instability and violence.

Foreign intervention has also contributed to the rise of jihadi groups. In 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan spurred the Muslim community members to defend their land and liberate themselves from a foreign power. The mobilization of the support from United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia to the Afghan mujahideen against the Soviets further enabled jihadism.⁶⁰ Embracing and seeking to further jihadism against invaders of Muslim lands, Osama bin Laden supported the Afghan mujahideen with funds, arms, and recruits. The 1990–1991 Gulf War,⁶¹ initiated by Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, further fostered bin Laden's extremism. The United States and its allies sent troops to the region to drive Hussein out of Kuwait. The troops occupied the Gulf in response to Hussein's invasion. The crux of the issue was the intervention by a half million U.S. and allied soldiers occupying the Persian Gulf; it was an outrage, an effrontery, to jihadists like

⁵⁷ McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*.

⁵⁸ Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants."

⁵⁹ Walter, "The Extremist's Advantage in Civil Wars."

⁶⁰ Wright, *The Jihadi Threat*.

⁶¹ Wright.

bin Laden that infidels were once again occupying Muslim lands. Furthermore, the American intervention in Iraq in 2003 ended the rule of Saddam Hussein and shifted the balance of power from a Sunni to Shia majority in Iraq, which led to a Shia-led government. However, an uprising of disgruntled and divided Sunni followed, launching an insurgency of Sunni extremism.

The subsequent departure of American forces in Iraq in 2011, combined with the pressures emanating from the sectarian divide across the Middle East, has fueled civil unrest and war. The Islamic State caliphate was established in this environment, growing from its previously declared proto-state with its own emir of the faithful. Its growth was enabled by the events of the Arab Spring, wherein nearby Syria protestors fought against the apprehension and torture of a crowd of teenagers who wrote revolutionary slogans on school property against the al-Assad regime. Bashar al-Assad security forces used lethal force against the protestors, which resulted in hundreds of thousands participating in a nationwide demonstration to expel Assad and the Syrian regime. By 2012, Syria was in a full-blown civil war; opposition forces formed the Free Syrian Army to fight against the Syrian Army. This conflict generated thousands of supporters for the cause, and many came from other countries who supported the removal of Assad. As a result, ISIS gained influence, and it also furthered the conflict of nationalist sectarianism.⁶² As Mohammed Hafez explains,

The defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan at the hands of Islamic insurgents during the 1980s was another milestone that motivated radical Muslims like Usama bin Ladin to take up arms against their own governments and to declare holy war (jihad) against Western powers. The goal of these radicals is to establish a new government based on Islamic law (shari'a) and unify the Islamic nation (umma) under a single Muslim ruler (khalifa or caliph). Radical Islam arose in the context of failed economic modernization by secular nationalist elites, political exclusion by

⁶² Homeland Security Committee, *Final Report of the Task Force on Combating Terrorist and Foreign Fighter Travel* (Washington, DC: Homeland Security Committee, 2015), <https://homeland.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/TaskForceFinalReport.pdf>.

authoritarian regimes, and a cultural shift toward religious revivalism or fundamentalism.⁶³

ISIS emphasizes the promises of a just Islamic state to those living under repressive regimes and a society where there is no corruption and where all true Muslim are honored. According to ISIS propaganda, its rhetoric promises that ISIS will protect the umma and the justice of Allah. ISIS campaign to recruit militants led to a new branding that it promotes to a broader audience. ISIS promoted its territory as a safe haven for families, where fighters would receive salaries of \$1,000 and their families would be provided homes and food and where children would receive religious teachings.⁶⁴

The message of ISIS stresses unity and an alternative nationalism with the goal of a new Islamist community. It intentionally emphasizes sectarian danger and the threat the U.S. and other foreign governments to Islam and Sunni Muslims.⁶⁵ The core of ISIS strategic doctrine is the superiority of Sunni Islam over all, especially close rivals (Shia) who contest Sunni power and identity. It seeks to unify Sunni Islam by picking on the powerful “other.” Sectarianism is a means to a larger end, and only one means. It just happens to set ISIS apart from its former leaders (al Qaeda command). Zarqawi demonstrated this by attacking Shias as a tactic to destabilize the Iraqi government, the population, and to undermine support for the U.S military presence. His tactics did not work, and U.S. forces killed him in 2006.

G. ISLAMIC RADICALIZATION

Jihadism is monolithic with only a small subgroup of supporters. This minority group rejects the secularist concept of the state and resorts to violence and justifies it by Islamic principles and beliefs. Jihadists all believe they must fight to restore the caliphate. Peter Bergen defines the term “jihadist” as “radicalized individuals using Islam as an ideological and religious justification for their belief in the establishment of a global

⁶³ Mohammed M. Hafez, “Radical Islam,” in *Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert Wuthnow (Washington DC: CQ Press, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781608712427.s162>, 465–470.

⁶⁴ Homeland Security Committee, *Final Report of the Task Force*.

⁶⁵ Byman, “Understanding the Islamic State.”

caliphate, or jurisdiction governed by a Muslim civil and religious leader known as a caliph.”⁶⁶ For example, jihad believers have no issue with their use of brutality and murder because they utilize the Quran, Hadith, and sharia law.⁶⁷ The message of a holy war among jihadists is alive and real. ISIS has strengthened its core since the declaration of the caliphate and believes that anything or anyone stepping in its path should be destroyed. With al-Baghdadi at the head of the helm, there are and will be no negotiations.

However, believers do not generally start out as radical jihadists. Often, the radicalization process of an individual to a jihadist develops when an individual decides that the only means necessary for their cause is to conduct violence. Embracing radicalization is a complex evolution, and the process involves a multitude of viewpoints and the justification of the use of force as a means of resolving issues or promoting transformation. In an effort to understand and identify variables that can impact a person’s mindset and move him or her toward violence, Hafez argues that, “Radicalization usually involves grievances, ideological socialization, social networking, and enabling support structures.”⁶⁸ This combination causes the individual to feel discriminated against or dehumanized. The individual breaks previous allegiances or trusts and then adopts a defensive stance that validates that there is a war on Islam and a call and duty to fight in honor.

The organizational roots of Islam radicalization carried violence with it. Three pronounced ideologies originally date back to the 1900s. The first was in 1928 when Hassan al-Banna founded the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The second began in 1941 when Abul Ala Mawdudi founded the Southern Asian Jama’ati Islami movement in British India. The third started in 1966 with Sayyid Qutb, an intellectual in the Muslim Brotherhood.⁶⁹ Each of these three men created an Islamic activist organization with the purpose of establishing a government based on the core principles of Islamic law. However,

⁶⁶ Bergen et al., *Jihadist Terrorism*.

⁶⁷ Bergen et al.

⁶⁸ Mohammed M. Hafez, “The Ties That Bind: How Terrorists Exploit Family Bonds,” *CTC Sentinel* 9, no. 2 (February 2016): 17, <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2016/02/CTC-SENTINEL-Vol9Iss210.pdf>.

⁶⁹ Hafez, “Radical Islam.”

many consider Qutb, a prolific educator, and writer, to be the ideological founder of Sunni Arab jihadism. Interestingly, he resided in Colorado from 1948 to 1951, and his

time in America seems to have begun the process of his radicalization; he complained about rampant racism against Arabs and Muslims in the United States, the moral degradation of American society, and U.S. support for the Jewish theft of Palestine.⁷⁰

Qutb's radicalization materialized with his book, *Milestones*, which articulates core doctrinal conceptualizations and ideologies that have formed Sunni jihadism.⁷¹ Qutb's writings have profoundly shaped and influence jihadists today.

Hafez identifies seven vital principles that justify the use of violence and terrorism:⁷²

- Widespread ignorance (*jahiliyyah*),
- Belief in God's sovereignty (*hakimiyyat*),
- Rejection of democracy because it violates God's sovereignty,
- Comprehensiveness and universalism of religion,
- The necessity of *takfir*—declaring a Muslim to be outside of the creed,
- Conspiracy against the Muslim world, and
- Holy war (*jihad*)—the path to God as an Islamic obligation.

The understanding and beliefs of Muslims who have radicalized are complex. Hafez states the four forms of Islamist radicalism are *revolutionary Islamism*, *Islamic*

⁷⁰ Glenn E. Robinson, "Jihadi Information Strategy: Sources, Opportunities, and Vulnerabilities," in *Information Strategy and Warfare*, ed. John Arquilla and Douglas Borer (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁷¹ John Arquilla and Douglas Borer, *Information Strategy and Warfare* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁷² Hafez, "Radical Islam."

*nationalism, transnational Islamic terrorism, and Islamic sectarianism.*⁷³ According to Hafez below are the following meanings:⁷⁴

- “*Revolutionary Islamism* seeks to transform the existing political order of any given state or national government. Revolutionary Islamists target their own governments and societies to overthrow the system and establish Islamic law in its place.”⁷⁵
- “*Islamic nationalism* seeks to harness the power of Islam to fight foreign occupiers and demand regional autonomy.”⁷⁶
- “*Transnational Islamic terrorism* aims to mobilize disparate Islamic groups and individuals to attack Western “enemies.” While the first two forms of radicalism focus their violence on the “near enemy,” transnational Islamic terrorism emphasizes attacking the “far enemy.” Usama bin Ladin, the supreme leader of al-Qaida, is the pioneer of global *jihad*.”⁷⁷
- “*Islamic sectarianism*, such as ISIS, represents a mixture of revolutionary Islamism, sectarian Islamism, and transnational terrorism. However, its most dominant feature is sectarianism.”⁷⁸

A crucial component in defeating these extremist groups is understanding them; however, the ideology of ISIS and other radical groups is complicated and problematic. The use of one specific strategy to reclaim seized territory or the deactivation of a critical leader will not wholly neutralize the existence of the group or stop its radicalization. One should note that neither radicalization nor holding extremist or jihadist beliefs is illegal in the United States. What is illegal is the creation of homegrown terrorists who pursue their radical beliefs manifesting them—or attempting to demonstrate them—into violent action.

H. PRESENT-DAY THREAT OF HOMEGROWN TERRORISM

A homegrown jihadist terrorist is a concern of the highest priority for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Intelligence Community, and our global, state, and local

⁷³ Hafez.

⁷⁴ Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*, New ed. (Boulder: Rienner, 2004).

⁷⁵ Hafez.

⁷⁶ Hafez.

⁷⁷ Hafez.

⁷⁸ Hafez.

partners.⁷⁹ As of May 2018, 161 citizens have been charged with ISIS-related crimes; in which 108 have been found guilty.⁸⁰ Many of these individuals are lone wolves who sow fear through the operational transnational network to aggravate security issues and create constant anxieties about future attacks.⁸¹ The ISIS ideology is a threat to every single American. Moreover, ISIS encourages violence on its behalf all over the world through social media; thus, its followers will continue to infiltrate this country and heed to the call of jihad, and a beaten ISIS grows more dependent on lone wolves. This terrorist organization has mastered the art of creating and inspiring these individuals; many of the masterminds behind these ISIS-inspired terrorist plots are Americans who support the group yet have no direct connection to it or any foreign members of the terrorist organization.

The upward trend of homegrown terrorism in the United States is troublesome. Arrests for ISIS-related attacks in the United States have been increasing. For comparison, there were 42 arrests of homegrown jihadist-inspired terrorist U.S. citizens from May 2009 through December 2012; however, from December 2015 to May 2018, there have been 161 arrests of homegrown terrorists who have supported ISIS.⁸² The increase is due in large part to the power and role of the Internet along with existing networks of friends and family that enable recruitment.⁸³ There is also evidence that anti-Muslim rhetoric has contributed to this rise; at a minimum, it appears to have increased pro-ISIS sentiment in the U.S, which suggests that an important policy would be to tone the rhetoric down.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, anti-

⁷⁹ "Terrorism," Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed May 30, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism>.

⁸⁰ "The Cases Program on Extremism," George Washington University, accessed May 5, 2018, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/cases>.

⁸¹ Byman, "Understanding the Islamic State."

⁸² George Washington University, "Cases Program on Extremism."

⁸³ Gordon Lederman, "Insider Threats: Homegrown Terrorism in the 21st Century," American Bar, July 1, 2012, http://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_services/law_national_security/patriot_debates2/the_book_online/ch2/ch2_ess1.html.

⁸⁴ Christopher A. Bail, Friedolin Merhout, and Peng Ding, "Using Internet Search Data to Examine the Relationship between Anti-Muslim and Pro-Isis Sentiment in U.S. Counties," *Science Advances* 4, no. 6 (2018), doi: 10.1126/sciadv.aao5948.

Muslim rhetoric appears to attract votes, so many of our current politicians are unwilling to embrace such a strategy.

U.S. citizens and residents who can be motivated and inspired by ISIS propaganda and influenced to take violent action are a threat to the nation. Lone actors or groups of homegrown extremists can plan and coordinate an attack without warning. The danger of this brand of terrorism is real, as illustrated by the attacks in Paris, France, in San Bernardino, California, and the Orlando, Florida, massacre.⁸⁵ The United States and its citizens remain to be the most targeted by ISIS-inspired attackers.⁸⁶ Americans inspired by this jihadist ideology see the caliphate as historical and the end of time is approaching, and they believe that jihad is a call of duty. Some want the adventure and the military training and experience of war. Others join because they have a mental issue or are struggling through a life crisis, and they are looking for a purpose to belong to something.⁸⁷

However, American Muslims, as compared to European Muslims, tend to have higher education levels, prominent careers, and are better integrated into society.⁸⁸ According to the Pew Research Center, a report titled, *The 2011 Muslim American Survey* interviewed 1,033 American Muslims in which concluded out of this survey size that, “among American Muslims, 20% are converts to Islam, saying they have not always been Muslim.”⁸⁹ ISIS and individuals who support this group are jihadists whose objective is to establish a transnational caliphate using military force; this is not a tenet in the practice of Islam that the majority of Muslims worldwide support.

⁸⁵ Byman, “Understanding the Islamic State.”

⁸⁶ Homeland Security Committee, *Terror Gone Viral: Overview of the 100+ ISIS Linked Plots against the West* (Washington, DC: Homeland Security Committee, 2016), <https://homeland.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/100-ISIS-Linked-Plots-Report-.pdf>.

⁸⁷ Homeland Security Committee, *Final Report of the Task Force*.

⁸⁸ Harris, “Why Do American Go Aboard?”

⁸⁹ “Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism,” Pew Research Center, August 30, 2011, <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/08/30/muslim-americans-no-signs-of-growth-in-alienation-or-support-for-extremism/>.

1. The Internet

ISIS's keen ability to recruit and inspire radicalization lies within the group's pioneering use of the Internet. The influence of ISIS has flourished on social media and motivated violence in honor of a misconception of Islam ideology. As previously stated ISIS's online propaganda campaign encourages attacks on all nonbelievers. As one example, the online magazine of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, called *Inspire*, written in English, urges followers to wage attacks in the United States and against all unbelievers.⁹⁰ Additionally, it encourages its supporters to execute small attacks and provides comprehensive and specific "how to" manuals and instructions on how to build and deploy a bomb, to how to orchestrate an attack.⁹¹ ISIS has repeatedly promoted lone wolf attacks in Western countries explicitly targetting soldiers, law enforcement, and intelligence members.⁹² ISIS's media spokesperson in 2014, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, urged followers to be resourceful when confronted with the opportunity to murder an unbeliever. He instructs, "Kill him in any manner or way however it may be: smash his head with a rock, or slaughter him with a knife, or run him over with your car."⁹³

Through the Internet, ISIS leverages online supporters and spreads propaganda resulting in terrorist activity. Moreover, it utilizes the Internet as a marketing tool to release speeches advocating violent and distributes high-quality media almost Hollywood-like that captures an alluring appeal to the organization. For instance, ISIS has released numerous videos glorifying horrific acts of murder, often by beheading, and brutality against its hostages. In 2004, ISIS abducted American Nicholas Berg, and Musab al-Zarqawi publicly

⁹⁰ *ISIL in America: Domestic Terror and Radicalization: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations of the House Judiciary Committee*, 114th Cong. (2015), 26 (testimony of Michael Steinbach, Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation), https://judiciary.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/114-6_93527.pdf.

⁹¹ *ISIL in America: Domestic Terror and Radicalization*.

⁹² *ISIL in America: Domestic Terror and Radicalization*.

⁹³ Craig Whiteside, "New Masters of Revolutionary Warfare: The Islamic State Movement (2002–2016)," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 4 (August 2016): SSN 2334–3745.

beheaded him. ISIS recorded and posted the graphic scene online. The video went viral and has been viewed tens of millions of times. Most Americans still remember that video and the shock they felt seeing it. As a result of the progression of technology since then, an online “black hole” has emerged that allows for infinite online recruitment possibilities for violent extremist groups to utilize. By 2015, ISIS was producing nearly 1,000 events a month on dozens of online platforms.⁹⁴ “More than half of these products depicted utopian images of life in the ‘caliphate,’ stressing economic activity, law and order, and the ability to worship according to the ‘correct method’ without interference.”⁹⁵

As Pierson Vern discusses in his 2017 thesis, “those who join the group are either ‘murderously devout’ or ‘devoutly murderous,’ individuals inspired by ISIS and its propaganda join or act because they agree with the organization’s destructive practices.”⁹⁶ ISIS’s narrative continues to remain that this is the “end times,” and an important call for all Muslims to defend Islam. Additionally, ISIS’s media campaign crafts a legendary tale of an Islam utopia by displaying images of ISIS members helping the elderly and giving health care to the sick; it portrays itself as a highly reliable organization that is meaningful and adventurous.⁹⁷

ISIS uses the Internet and social media sites to connect and distribute to a global audience. This technology has become an incubator for ISIS influence and recruitment because of the multitude of networks its propaganda reaches. To understand the scope of the online presence extremist groups like ISIS have, consider that in 2003 there were 2,600 known websites through which these groups operated, whereas, in 2013, there are

⁹⁴ Whiteside, “New Masters of Revolutionary Warfare.”

⁹⁵ Craig Whiteside, *Lighting the Path: The Evolution of the Islamic State Media Enterprise (2003–2016)* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.19165/2016.1.14>.

⁹⁶ Vern Pierson, “Western Radicalization: Rethinking the Psychology of Terrorism” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2017), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/53034>.

⁹⁷ Byman, “Understanding the Islamic State.”

approximately 10,000 known sites.⁹⁸ Furthermore, extremists also use various platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, blogs, various apps, and mobile devices, all of which instantly disburse their information worldwide. The various social media platforms available also allow ISIS and its supports to operate on the “darknet,” where the users enable encryption software and secure messaging applications. Making it challenging and complex to detect and disrupt attacks, which impacts counterterrorism efforts.

Terrorist propaganda will continue, and homegrown terrorists, driven by a variety of grievances, will be motivated and inspired. As Daniel Coats argues,

Homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) will remain the most prevalent and difficult-to-detect Sunni terrorist threat at home, despite a drop in the number of attacks in 2017. HVE attacks are likely to continue to occur with little or no warning because the perpetrators often strike soft targets and use simple tactics that do not require advanced skills or outside training.⁹⁹

The threat remains constant in the United States and to ensure that Americans feel safe, it is vital that U.S. government agencies promote national resilience to Islamic extremism. Former FBI Director James Comey stated, “ISIS blends traditional media platforms, glossy photos, in-depth articles, and social media campaigns that can go viral in a matter of seconds.”¹⁰⁰ He also noted,

With the widespread horizontal distribution of social media, terrorists can identify vulnerable individuals of all ages in the United States—spot, assess, recruit, and radicalize—either to travel or to conduct a homeland attack. The foreign terrorist now has direct access to the United States like never before.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Mark Chang, “Trolling New Media: Violent Extremist Groups Recruiting through Social Media” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2015), https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/47919/15Dec_Chang_Mark.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

⁹⁹ *Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community*, Daniel Coats, Director of National Intelligence (Washington, DC: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2017), <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/SSCI%20Unclassified%20SFR%20-%20Final.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Steinbach, “ISIL Online: Countering Terrorist Radicalization and Recruitment on the Internet and Social Media,” *FBI News*, July 6, 2016, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/isil-online-countering-terrorist-radicalization-and-recruitment-on-the-internet-and-social-media->.

¹⁰¹ Steinbach, “ISIL Online.”

Social media networks have become the incubator to cultivate online holy war propaganda from ISIS.

2. Recruitment

ISIS hopes to build a global Islamic society that lives under strict Islamic sharia law. Recruitment is a crucial part of ISIS's strategy to do this. Alluring social media publications are used to target individuals who gravitate to it have become useful recruitment tools. ISIS inspires foreign fighters to flee their homeland and live in an Islamic society, where they are rewarded and taken care, or it motivates individuals to become lone-wolf attackers and either to support the organization or plan to plot their attack. To some, there seems to be an alluring appeal and an irresistible attraction of ISIS.

To make the masses fearful, ISIS synchronizes its operations to capture images of its venomous maneuvers and then distributes them online to thousands of potential recruits. This has led ISIS to achieve substantial enlistment numbers. Despite the loss of hundreds of members during its engagements, it gains hundreds more by attracting supporters from across the globe to its cause.¹⁰² The successful recruitment campaigns of ISIS have lured hundreds of thousand supporters and thus threaten both the United States and its allies.

ISIS uses specific techniques to reach a broad range of individuals for recruitment. For example, some insight into ISIS recruitment tactics comes through people such as former American jihadist recruiter, Jess Morton, who ran the website Revolution Muslim. While active, he was the most productive American recruiter for Al Qaeda. Morton is a U.S. citizen from New York, but he no longer follows the radical Islamic ideology he sought once to inspire in others. In 2015, he was released from prison, and then he worked as an FBI informant and became a fellow at George Washington University's Program on Extremism researching Islamic extremists.¹⁰³ Morton explains that during the peak of his recruitment success, he would implant a theoretical concept of Islam in his potential recruit,

¹⁰² Byman, "Understanding the Islamic State."

¹⁰³ Rukmini Callimachi, "Once a Qaeda Recruiter, Now a Voice against Jihad," *New York Times*, August 20, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/30/us/al-qaeda-islamic-state-jihad-fbi.html>.

either during conversations in private messages or through his social media postings. In a 2016 interview featured in the *New York Times*, Morton explained,

The first concept is that God is the sole lawgiver. Then you use that principle to say that all the Muslim rulers, because they do not implement Sharia law in its entirety, they are not Muslim at all, and so we can rebel against them.¹⁰⁴

ISIS recruitment has been effective. An estimated 1,400 Americans—travelers or supporters—have mobilized in aid of jihad.¹⁰⁵ Given the past 40 years of jihadist conflicts, the support ISIS receives in Syria and Iraq from U.S. homegrown terrorists has been the most unprecedented that the West has encountered to date. As Sean Reynolds and Mohammed Hafez note, “In total about 30,000 both men and women from at least 86 countries have traveled to these conflicts, making the contingent of Western combatants among the largest at nearly 17%.”¹⁰⁶ Moreover, law enforcement officials estimate that 250 Americans have tried to join ISIS since 2014¹⁰⁷ with dozens of U.S. citizens traveling to Syria and Iraq.¹⁰⁸ Researchers have studied the complexities of radicalization and recruitment of American citizens who have left their American lives behind and traveled to distant lands in the name of jihad. For example, in his book *Jihad Joe*, John Berger states, “to defend Muslims in peril, some fight to establish the reign of Allah on earth. Some are channeling a personal rage, and others seek a community they can belong to.”¹⁰⁹

Social media is an innovation that has mostly benefited terrorists. As Gordon McCormick and Frank Giordano assert, “The Internet has made symbolic violence a more

¹⁰⁴ Callimachi, “Once a Qaeda Recruiter.”

¹⁰⁵ Berger, *Jihad Joe*, vi.

¹⁰⁶ Sean Reynolds and Mohammed M. Hafez, “Social Network Analysis of German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq,” *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence* (February 2017): 1, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/51939>.

¹⁰⁷ Richard Engel et al., “The Americans: 15 Who Left the United States to Join ISIS,” *NBC News*, May 15, 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/americans-15-who-left-united-states-join-isis-n573611>.

¹⁰⁸ Brian Michael Jenkins, *The Dynamics of the Conflicts in Syria and Iraq and the Threat Posed by Homegrown Terrorists and Returning Western Fighters* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015), 13, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT400/CT443/RAND_CT443.pdf.

¹⁰⁹ John M. Berger, *Jihad Joe: Americans Who Go to War in the Name of Islam* (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, 2011), vii.

powerful instrument of insurgent mobilization than at any time in the past.”¹¹⁰ Homegrown terrorists who support Islamic extremism are sometimes called lone wolves even though they are never truly alone due to their deliberate, persistent search for online communities. According to Lisa Monaco, “ISIS has created a sophisticated media machine that pumps out professionally produced videos, multilingual tweets, a glossy magazine, and Instagram posts, all serving up an intoxicating narrative that followers can belong to a cause greater than themselves.”¹¹¹ The U.S. government has experienced many challenges with the social media system.

In June 2017, a group of technology companies created the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, a consortium devoted to making their platforms less hospitable to extremists. Facebook, which boasts more than two billion active monthly users, is employing artificial intelligence and image-matching technology to stop known terrorist content from proliferating. Twitter, for its part, has suspended more than 375,000 accounts promoting terrorism.¹¹²

Increased countering violent extremism (CVE) funding and resources from the U.S. government would boost efforts to degrade homegrown terrorist resources. YouTube has implemented restrictions on Islamic jihadists, such as Anwar al-Awlaki, by blocking his contents and those of others who spread this form of Islamic ideology to decrease the potential of recruitment and radicalization among ISIS followers. Tech companies such as Google, Twitter, and Facebook are taking removing this material seriously and have implemented procedures to block and remove terrorist content from their platforms.¹¹³ Despite the tech companies efforts, it is a continuous battle to prevent terrorist material that recruits and provokes violence that promotes extremism and radicalization.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Gordon McCormick and Frank Giordano, “Things Come Together: Symbolic Violence and Guerrilla Mobilization,” *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2007): 295–320.

¹¹¹ Monaco, “Preventing the Next Attack.”

¹¹² Monaco.

¹¹³ Natalia Drozdak and Stephanie Bodoni, “Tech Giants Face Terror Law in EU Crackdown on Internet Hate,” *Bloomberg News*, July 28, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-07-28/tech-giants-face-terror-law-in-eu-crackdown-on-internet-hate>.

¹¹⁴ Hany Farid, “Recruiting Terrorists: We’re Losing the Fight against Online Extremism—Here’s Why,” *The Hill*, August 2, 2018, <http://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/399962-recruiting-terrorists-were-losing-the-fight-against-online>.

3. National Security and Domestic Terrorism

The FBI's priority is to ensure the United States and its citizens are always protected.¹¹⁵ Some of the FBI's focus is to ensure the deactivation of terrorist cells, to deter terrorist sympathizers, and to dismantle potential terrorist financing or support individuals offer to terrorist organizations. Since 9/11, the number of U.S. persons presenting security concerns on the "No Fly" list and the number of FBI task force teams have both increased considerably. In 2001, the list had 16 individuals, and the FBI operated 35 joint terrorism fusion centers; however, 15 years later, there are over 81,000 individuals on the No Fly list, and the FBI now operates over 100 counter-terrorism centers in the United States.¹¹⁶

The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) is another organization that protects the security interests of the United States. NCTC tracks potential foreign fighters who have traveled, or are suspected of planning travel, to Syria or Iraq to support ISIS. NCTC and the Intelligence Community collaborate their efforts to monitor known travelers in a U.S. government repository known as Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment. The repository identifies, tracks, and shares information with law enforcement and watch-list communities to assess and confirm the identity of known or suspected terrorists so they can be monitored.¹¹⁷ NCTC continues to expand its CVE efforts and collaborates with DHS, local law enforcement, and community leaders to identify markers of possible recruitment as well as to develop prevention action approaches and frameworks to confront the threat of homegrown Islamic extremists.

The 2018 *Worldwide Threat Assessment* indicates the continued usage of Internet recruitment by terrorist groups will continue to garner more followers who could potentially synchronize their operations. The assessment also suggests that transnational terrorists have cyber capabilities that can result in extortion and theft of U.S. networks and

¹¹⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Terrorism."

¹¹⁶ Bergen et al., *Jihadist Terrorism*.

¹¹⁷ *Hearing before the House Committee on Homeland Security, Countering Violent Islamist Extremism: The Urgent Threat of Foreign Fighters and Homegrown Terror* (2015), (testimony of Nicholas J. Rasmussen, Director, National Counterterrorism Center), https://www.dni.gov/files/NCTC/documents/news_documents/Countering_Violent_Islamist_Extremism.pdf.

expose personally identifiable information of U.S. citizens as well as increase cybersecurity vulnerabilities in the United States.¹¹⁸ This creates an impact on the Intelligence Community because of the breach of information this presents to national security information, proprietary data and files to companies and research institutions. Specifically, the *Worldwide Threat Assessment* believes transnational terrorists will target companies in defense, energy, finance, and technology.¹¹⁹ The improvement of nonstate actors' intelligence capabilities enables them to conduct a plethora of illicit activities and avoid detection. This activity poses a threat to the United States in the cyber arena.¹²⁰

I. THREAT OF ISIS SUPPORTERS ON U.S. SOIL AND U.S. GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

The attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, were a landmark event in the modern history of terrorism. Those events signaled both that terrorism is operationally sophisticated and that it has tremendous power to influence society at large and worldwide. Individuals who have decided to travel abroad to join a terrorist organization abroad is a growing threat to the United States. This study concentrates on the phenomenon of American citizens who have conducted or plotted attacks within the United States. The *New American* report claims that the motivations of such terrorists are complicated.

The motivations of jihadists in the United States are difficult to disentangle. After reviewing hundreds of cases in this database, thousands of pages of court documents, and interviews and correspondence with extremists and their family members, it is far from clear there will ever be a straightforward answer.¹²¹

Jihadists put their faith in Salafi Islam's radicalized beliefs, and they have determined that it is their religious obligation to wage violence against all non-Muslims and Muslims who do not follow sharia law. The ISIS interpretation of Islam and the

¹¹⁸ *Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment.*

¹¹⁹ *Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment.*

¹²⁰ *Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment s.*

¹²¹ Bergen et al., *Jihadist Terrorism.*

organization's quest to dominate are part of a prophetic methodology leading to an apocalyptic outcome. For the last two decades, the continued rise of homegrown jihadist that has inspired terrorists to plot attacks in the United States is a clear indication that domestic Islamic radicalization is a threat to combat.

1. Introduction and Background

In 2014, ISIS grabbed the world's attention with the spectacularly brutal violence that it unleashed throughout the Middle East. Just three years later, in 2017, ISIS suffered a massive defeat by the U.S.-led military coalition in Iraq and Syria. Despite the end of its physical caliphate, ISIS continues to pose a significant threat. Rather than encouraging foreign fighters to flock to a battlefield in Syria or Iraq, ISIS, using an ever-evolving array of tactics, is seeking to motivate and inspire attacks on foreign soil, including the United States, as well as in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Ultimately, numerous attacks and plots worldwide are linked ISIS. In addition to the threat of terrorism from those abroad, the United States has witnessed the phenomenon of homegrown terrorists, posing a new kind of threat from within. To better repel this threat, counterterrorism policies in the United States need to ensure policymakers implement effective policies to mitigate this threat and focus on recruitment disengagement efforts. To that end, a range of experts has undertaken considerable deliberative discussions about the state and future of ISIS in the United States. Terrorist expert and author William McCants asserts, "the Islamic State is one of the most lethal and successful Salafi-jihadist groups in modern history."¹²² To reinforce military efforts against the threat ISIS poses in Iraq and Syria, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) formally established the Combined Joint Task Force—Operation Inherent Resolve in October 2014. Its mission is to "continue to work by, with and through regional partners to militarily defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, in order to enable whole-of-coalition governmental actions to increase

¹²² McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 5.

regional stability.”¹²³ As of April 2018, the coalition has conducted 24,566 airstrikes and spent \$1.43 billion on kinetic military operations related to countering ISIS.¹²⁴ Yet, despite multiple operational defeats in 2017, ISIS continues to spread its extremist ideology worldwide and motivate individuals to commit acts of terror.

In late 2014, U.S. Department of State (DOS) created the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS; as the name emphasizes, it is an international coalition joined in the defeat of ISIS.¹²⁵ To promote conflict resolutions to compete with and ultimately suppress Salafi jihadist movements, both the U.S. government and its military need to sponsor significant security efforts both overseas and domestically to enable legitimate local governance to counter conditions and behaviors that allow ISIS to take root and thrive.¹²⁶ However, it is challenging and often perplexing to hypothesize about measures to prevent domestic terrorism. The nature of terrorism has changed how the United States designs and develops policies for national security and law enforcement. Author Jonathan White claims terrorism is a social activity, specifying the concept that terrorism is organized by groups of people who define social reality and either sustain or change their beliefs. Even when a person acts individually, some social process is behind the person’s definition of reality.¹²⁷

2. Terrorism

U.S. laws prohibit support for anti-American extremists abroad under the 1994 law regarding Providing Material Support to Terrorists, 18 U.S.C. § 2339A. This law prohibits any citizen or resident from supporting a foreign terrorist organization through providing money, property, lodging, training, or any or all assistance to an organization.¹²⁸

¹²³ “Operation Inherent Resolve,” U.S. Department of Defense, accessed April 29, 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/OIR/>.

¹²⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, “Operation Inherent Resolve.”

¹²⁵ U.S. Department of Defense.

¹²⁶ Katherine Zimmerman, “The Never-Ending War on Terror,” *Foreign Affairs*, May 11, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-05-11/never-ending-war-terror>.

¹²⁷ Jonathan Randall White, *Terrorism and Homeland Security*, 8th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2014), 26.

¹²⁸ Alphonso Harris, “Why Do Americans Go Aboard to Fight in Foreign Conflicts?” (Master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018), <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/59679>.

However, if a person does support a foreign terrorist organization as ISIS is he or she identified as a terrorist or a criminal? Domestic terrorism in the United States lacks a traditional definition, and this causes confusion among agencies. Without a precise definition, there are multiple classification systems law-enforcement agencies use to define terrorism and terrorists, and it makes for a fundamental lack of clarity. Definitions vary from those who foster terrorist tactics to actors of influence. In 2017, Congress defined domestic terrorism as

criminal conduct that takes place primarily in the United States and involves acts dangerous to human life that appear to be intended to either intimidate or coerce a group of people or to influence government policy through intimidation or coercion.¹²⁹

However, despite the differences, there is an agreement regarding the characteristics of terrorism, such as violence, and that the threat of terrorism is generally centered around specific behaviors. The defining commonality is the label *terrorism* or *terrorist* that manifests when the actors believe the violence they cause is justified and label themselves revolutionaries or freedom fighters. Author and terrorism expert Peter Brookes suggests that the term “terrorism” connotes violence or the threat of violence.¹³⁰ Bruce Hoffman, another expert on terrorism, defines terrorism “as organized threat of political violence by a group that intentionally inflict psychological influence.”¹³¹ In yet another definition, DOS defines terrorism as “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”¹³² DHS defines terrorism in two ways¹³³

¹²⁹ Michael Vigil, “Domestic Terrorism: The Threat in Our Backyard,” *The Cipher Brief*, March 22, 2018, https://www.thecipherbrief.com/column_article/domestic-terrorism-threat-backyard.

¹³⁰ Peter Brookes, *A Devil’s Triangle: Terrorism, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and Rogue States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

¹³¹ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, rev. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

¹³² “Countering Violent Extremism Task Force,” U.S. Department of Homeland Security, accessed October 15, 2017, <https://www.dhs.gov/cve/task-force>.

¹³³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Terrorism.”

- “International terrorism: Perpetrated by individuals and groups inspired by or associated with designated foreign terrorist organizations or nations.”¹³⁴
- “Domestic terrorism: Perpetrated by individuals and groups inspired by or associated with primarily U.S.-based movements that espouse extremist ideologies of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature.”¹³⁵

3. Attacks on U.S. Soil

The threat violent homegrown jihadi extremists present on America soil is substantial. Since 2014, there have been eleven ISIS-related attacks in the United States, costing 82 American lives and injuring over a hundred.¹³⁶ Since the September 11 attacks, the terrorist threat to the United States has been perpetrated by homegrown jihadist individuals inspired by ISIS. “Jihadist terrorists use virtual and physical networks around the world to radicalize isolated individuals, exploit vulnerable populations, and inspire and direct plots”¹³⁷ Because of the significant threat homegrown terrorism pose, policies and domestic counterterrorism measures must speak to the current increase of American-based ISIS supporters. The House Homeland Security Committee reports that since 2013, there have been 154 homegrown jihadists in the United States. The committee conducts a monthly assessment that highlights the growing threat that America, the West, and the world face from ISIS and other Islamist terrorists. Figure 1 presents a snapshot of the July 2018 terror threat.

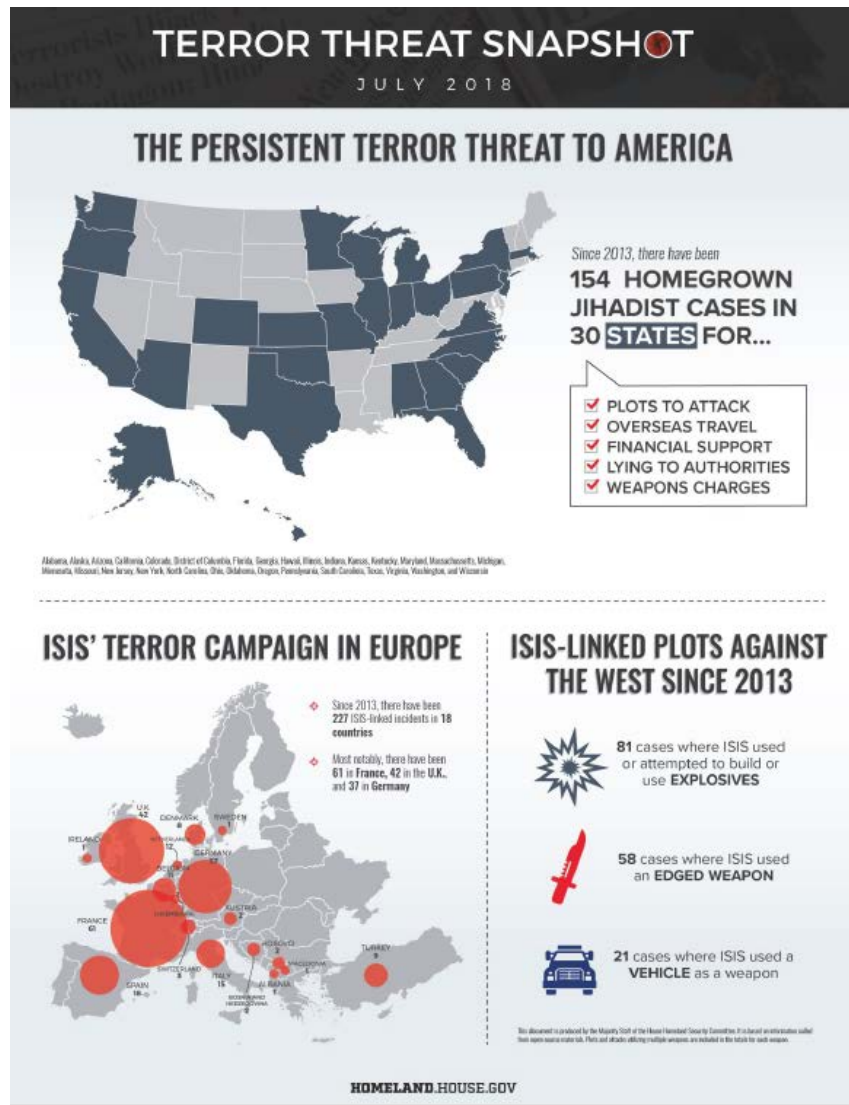
¹³⁴ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Countering Violent Extremism Task Force.”

¹³⁵ U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

¹³⁶ Tim Lister et al., “ISIS Goes Global: 143 Attacks in 29 Countries Have Killed 2,043,” *CNN*, February 12, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/12/17/world/mapping-isis-attacks-around-the-world/index.html>.

¹³⁷ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017).

Figure 1. July 2018 Terror Threat Snapshot¹³⁸



Homegrown terrorists are produced through various means. There are individuals who radicalize because of experiences, and others who form connections with others associated with the terrorist group. For example, U.S. Army Major Nidal Hasan, conducted a massive shooting spree in Fort Hood, Texas, that killed and wounded several military personnel. Nidal Hasan claimed he was influenced by the radical online preaching and propaganda disseminated by Anwar Awlaki, an American emir. Awlaki and Major Hasan

¹³⁸ Source: Homeland Security Committee, *Terror Gone Viral*.

communicated via email, and Hasan was inspired by Awlaki's preaching and teachings of Islam and jihad.¹³⁹

National security needs to address the threat by this extreme, relentless, dangerous, and well-trained organization because Americans (like Major Hasan), who are driven by a radical concept of Islamic ideology,¹⁴⁰ are deserting America and declaring war on its land and people. "Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States has been grappling with how to reduce the growth and influence of Salafi jihadist groups whose goals directly threaten U.S. interests."¹⁴¹ The successful formulation of counter strategies to disengage U.S. citizens from becoming radical is an essential task for the United States government.

Without its operating bases in Syria and Iraq, ISIS is most likely to focus on encouraging and claiming credit for inspired attacks instead of directed and coordinated attacks. For example, in December 2017, an attempted bombing by Akayed Ullah targeted the New York Port Authority Bus Terminal, resulted in four people sustaining injuries. By focusing on counter-radicalization efforts both online and between local communities and federal authorities, we can decrease the potential for recruitment and increase cooperation within the United States. This will decrease incidents such as the one Ullah attempted to perpetuate.

¹³⁹ Counter Extremism Project, *Guide to Online Propagandists* (New York: Counter Extremism Project, 2018), <https://www.counterextremism.com/content/guide-online-propagandists>.

¹⁴⁰ *Hijra* is an Arabic word that means "migration or journey." However, defendants in terrorism cases investigated by the FBI have used the term to refer to traveling from the United States to Syria to join ISIL a known foreign terrorist organization and violent extremist group. Additionally, one of the English-language manuals released by ISIL in 2015 containing guidance on how Western recruits can evade detection includes *hijra* in its title.

¹⁴¹ Walter, "The Extremist's Advantage," 12.

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II. ANALYSIS OF THE ISIS-INSPIRED HOMEGROWN THREAT

Through the use of simple statistical data, the factors associated with the spread of ISIS-related crimes and homegrown terrorists in the United States can be reviewed. This chapter discusses U.S. citizens charged with ISIS crimes within the United States. In general, since the escalation of ISIS from 2014 to 2017, 82 individuals have been killed in the United States because of homegrown terrorists.

A. PREVIOUS STUDIES

The threat of homegrown terrorism and jihadi inspiration does exist in the United States.¹⁴² A homegrown jihadist terrorist is an American citizen or legal resident who plots an attack(s) in support of Islamic radicalization and theology. From all accounts, terrorism experts such as John M. Berger, William McCants, and Peter Brookes all agree that ISIS seeks to inspire Americans to implement a campaign of individual jihads within the United States.¹⁴³ Brian Jenkins, who is a former U.S. Army Special Forces officer, a senior adviser at the RAND Corporation, a well-published author and an expert in terrorism, states, “The U.S. homeland faces a multilayered threat from terrorist organizations. Homegrown jihadists account for most of the terrorist activity in the United States since 9/11.”¹⁴⁴ Jenkins’s RAND report examined 178 U.S. citizens either who have conducted domestic jihadist terrorist attacks or who have been arrested for plotting an attack.

This thesis uses two principal sources as information, the *New America’s Terrorism in America After 9/11* and the *George Washington University’s Program of Extremism*. *Terrorism in America After 9/11* is a compendium of homegrown terrorists that has tracked over 415 cases of individuals charged with homegrown terrorism. The George Washington

¹⁴² See Appendix B, which details all attacks from 2014 to 2017 in the United States.

¹⁴³ Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Seamus Hughes, and Bennett Clifford, *The Travelers: American Jihadists in Syria and Iraq* (Washington DC: George Washington University Program on Extremism, 2018), <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/TravelersAmericanJihadistsinSyriaandIraq.pdf>.

¹⁴⁴ Brian Michael Jenkins, *The Origins of America’s Jihadists* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2017).

University's Program on Extremism provides a thorough analysis of Americans who have joined ISIS and acted on its behalf. Additionally, researchers with the Program on Extremism has reviewed over 10,000 criminal complaints, indictments, affidavits, and courtroom transcripts of ISIS-related legal proceedings in the United States. The program's data is an online collection reflecting the increasing number of individuals who have undergone ISIS radicalization and recruitment in the United States.¹⁴⁵ When it comes to U.S. citizens supporting ISIS, quantitative research is sparse. However, the George Washington University Program on Extremism¹⁴⁶ has identified three categories of homegrown ISIS-American terrorists: a foreign fighter (one who travels abroad to fight in support of the group); a domestic plotter (one who lives in and plans an attack in the United States); and the domestic supporter of the group (one who provides it with material support).¹⁴⁷

B. ISIS SUPPORTERS IN THE UNITED STATES

As of May 2018, 161 U.S. citizens have been charged with ISIS-related offenses (since the beginning of 2015), and 108 have been found guilty of either ISIS-related support or activity.¹⁴⁸ In contrast, in 2014, a total of 32 were found guilty of supporting ISIS. As of this writing, the following is an updated profile of a domestic ISIS supporter (these numbers have shown an increase since 2014)¹⁴⁹ (see Figure 2):

- Average age is 28,
- 90 percent are male,
- 13.4 years is the average sentence,
- 28 states have cases where a homegrown terrorist was charged,

¹⁴⁵ George Washington University, "The Cases Program on Extremism."

¹⁴⁶ George Washington University.

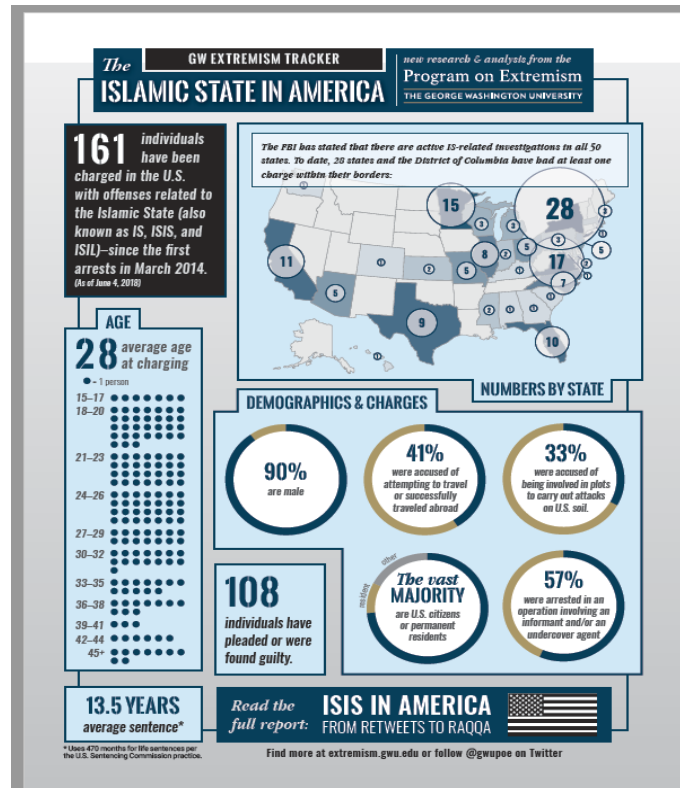
¹⁴⁷ George Washington University.

¹⁴⁸ *Combatting Homegrown Terrorism: Written Testimony of Seamus Hughes, Deputy Director, Program on Extremism, George Washington University, before the U.S. House of Representatives Oversight and Government Reform* (2017), <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/extremism.gwu.edu/files/HughesCombattingHomegrownTerrorism727.pdf>.

¹⁴⁹ George Washington University, "The Cases Program on Extremism."

- 41 percent are suspected foreign fighters
- 33 percent participated in plotting an attack, and
- 56 percent arrested in operations involving informants and undercover agents.¹⁵⁰

Figure 2. George Washington Extremism Tracker, May 2018¹⁵¹



The George Washington University’s study specifies charges categorized by the percentage of individuals attempting to travel abroad, the percentage of individuals accused of plotting attacks, and the percentage of individuals arrested for an operation involving either informant or an undercover agent. Also incorporated are the percentages of ISIS-related arrests within each state across the United States. For example, in December 2015,

¹⁵⁰ George Washington University.

¹⁵¹ Source: George Washington University, “The Cases Program on Extremism.”

there were a total of 71 ISIS arrests in 21 states. According to the George Washington University data, the top three states for ISIS arrests for that period were New York (13), Minnesota (11), and California (5). In April of 2018, 28 states have ISIS arrests with the top three were New York (28), Virginia (17) and Minnesota (15).¹⁵² All charged with supporting a known foreign terrorist organization. Moreover, some have also been charged with other infractions, such as false information to authorities, passport fraud, or weapons possession.

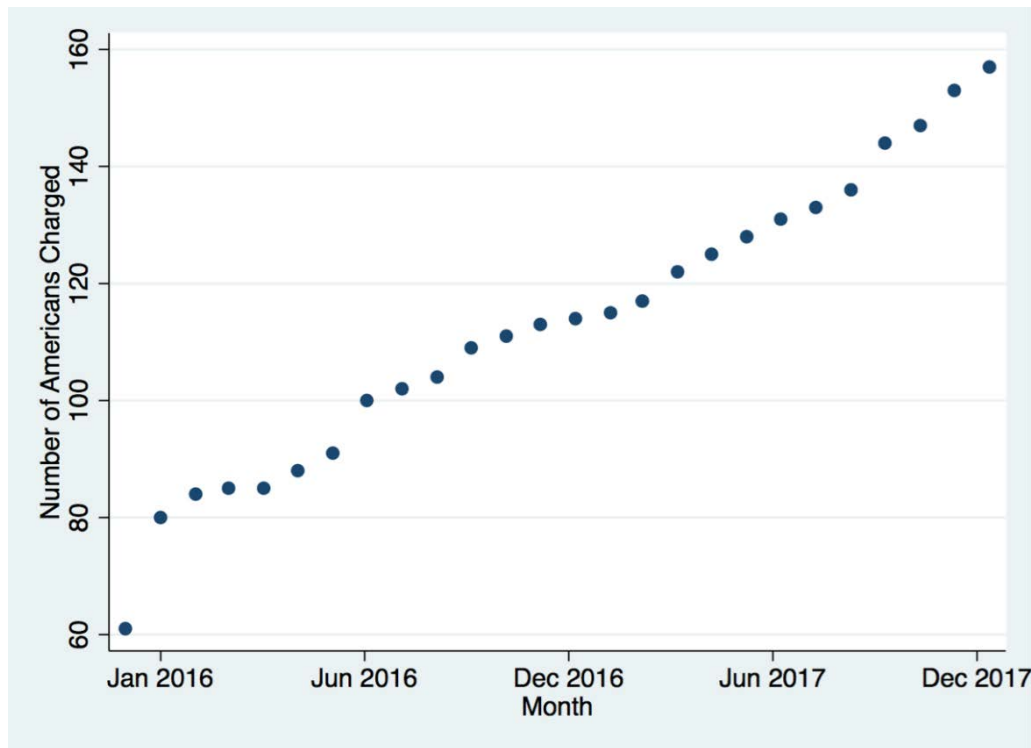
In December of 2017 in an oversight hearing, FBI Director Christopher Wray stated “currently, the FBI views ISIS and homegrown violent extremists as main terrorism threats to the United States.”¹⁵³ Six months later, in May 2018, for the fifth time in three years, DHS raised the warning of homegrown terrorism threats. The threat spurred the Trump administration to declare that ISIS continues to be a security threat.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, as Figure 3 indicates, the number of Americans charged for engaging in ISIS-related activities has increased substantially in recent years. As noted earlier, this is primarily due to the power and role of the Internet, existing networks of friends and family that enable recruitment, and anti-Muslim rhetoric. This thesis primarily focuses on the first two factors, but the third should not be dismissed as unimportant.

¹⁵² George Washington University, “The Cases Program on Extremism.”

¹⁵³ Lisa Rose, “US Has 1,000 Open ISIS Investigations but a Steep Drop in Prosecutions,” *CNN*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/05/16/politics/isis-us-arrests-investigations-terrorism/index.html>.

¹⁵⁴ Rose, “US Has 1,000 Open ISIS Investigations.”

Figure 3. Increase in Number of Americans Charged for ISIS-Related Activities



In December of 2015, a total of 56 U.S. citizens were arrested for terrorism in 21 states across the country, which were holding a total of 71 Americans charged with ISIS-related activities that year.¹⁵⁵ By December of 2017, a total of 153 U.S. citizen have been charged with ISIS-related offenses that spread across 28 states.¹⁵⁶ Homegrown ISIS-inspired terrorist does show an increase throughout this period.

C. ISIS-RELATED ATTACKS IN THE UNITED STATES

The information below includes the number of ISIS-related fatalities and injuries from attacks executed in the United States. The GW Extreme Tracker drew these sums from 2014 to 2018 from a *CNN* compilation of ISIS-connected incidents in the United

¹⁵⁵ George Washington University, “The Cases Program on Extremism.”

¹⁵⁶ George Washington University.

States. Since 2014 and the declaration of the caliphate, ISIS has conducted and inspired hundreds of global attacks. In the United States from 2014 to 2017, there were 11 attacks that killed 82 and injured 137 citizens. All of these attacks were executed by individuals inspired by ISIS, typically by online propaganda; however, many of them did not have direct contact with an ISIS member overseas. Here is a look at ISIS-inspired attacks in the United States, conducted by homegrown terrorists (also see Figure 4):

- “On October 23, 2014, in an attack known as the “Queens hatchet attack,” a recent convert to Islam and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) supporter attacked two police officers with a hatchet. One civilian was wounded when other officers attempted to shoot the attacker.”¹⁵⁷
- “On May 3, 2015, in the Curtis Culwell Center attack in Garland Texas, two individuals attacked police officers with gunfire at an exhibit featuring cartoon images of Muhammad.”¹⁵⁸
- “November 4, 2015, at the University of California, Merced, Faisal Mohammad stabbed four people before being shot to death by police. Authorities concluded the attack ISIS related and inspired.”¹⁵⁹
- “On December 2, 2015, in the San Bernardino, California, attack, married couple Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik opened fire on a holiday party at the Inland Regional Center before fleeing. The wife had sworn allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in a Facebook post the day of the massacre. The couple killed 14 people and injured 24.”¹⁶⁰
- “January 8, 2016, Edward Archer was arrested in Philadelphia after shooting police officer Jesse Hartnett, who survived the attack. Archer committed the offense in support of ISIS.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Michael Schwartz, “Attacker with Hatchet Is Said to Have Grown Radical on His Own,” *New York Times*, October 25, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/25/nyregion/man-who-attacked-police-with-hatchet-ranted-about-us-officials-say.html>.

¹⁵⁸ Adam Chandler, “A Terror Attack in Texas,” *The Atlantic*, May 4, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2015/05/a-terror-attack-in-texas/392288/>.

¹⁵⁹ Lister et al., “ISIS Goes Global.”

¹⁶⁰ “San Bernardino Terror Attack: Police Describe Gun Battle with Terrorist Couple,” *Fox News*, May 26, 2017, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2017/05/26/san-bernardino-terror-attack-terrorists-were-shot-up-to-27-times-during-gun-battle-with-police.html>.

¹⁶¹ Lister et al., “ISIS Goes Global.”

- “On June 12, 2016, Omar Mateen, a 29-year-old security guard, killed 49 people and wounded 53 others with gunfire in a terrorist attack-/hate crime inside Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida.”¹⁶²
- “On July 16, 2015, Mohammad Abdulazeez killed five people in shootings at two military facilities in Chattanooga, Tennessee.”¹⁶³
- “In September 2016, in New York City, 30 people were injured when a homemade bomb exploded in the Chelsea neighborhood.”¹⁶⁴
- “On November 2016 in the Ohio State University attack, Abdul Razak Ali Artan stabbed people and ran others over with a car, injuring 11. ISIS praised the attack.”¹⁶⁵
- “In October 2017 in the New York City truck attack, a driver used a flatbed pickup truck as a weapon to strike pedestrians on the bike path in Lower Manhattan, New York City; eight were killed, and 12 were injured.”¹⁶⁶
- “In December 2017, in the New York City attempted bombing attack, Akayed Ullah, age 27, tried a suicide bombing at the 42nd Street-Port Authority Bus Terminal. The crude pipe bomb injured four people, including the bomber.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Ralph Ellis, “Orlando Shooting: 49 Killed, Shooter Pledged ISIS Allegiance,” *CNN*, June 12, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/06/12/us/orlando-nightclub-shooting/index.html>.

¹⁶³ Peter Bergan, Courtney Schuster, and David Sterman, *ISIS in the West: The New Faces of Extremism* (Washington, DC: New America 2015), https://www.newamerica.org/documents/1432/ISP-Isis-In-The-West_2015.pdf.

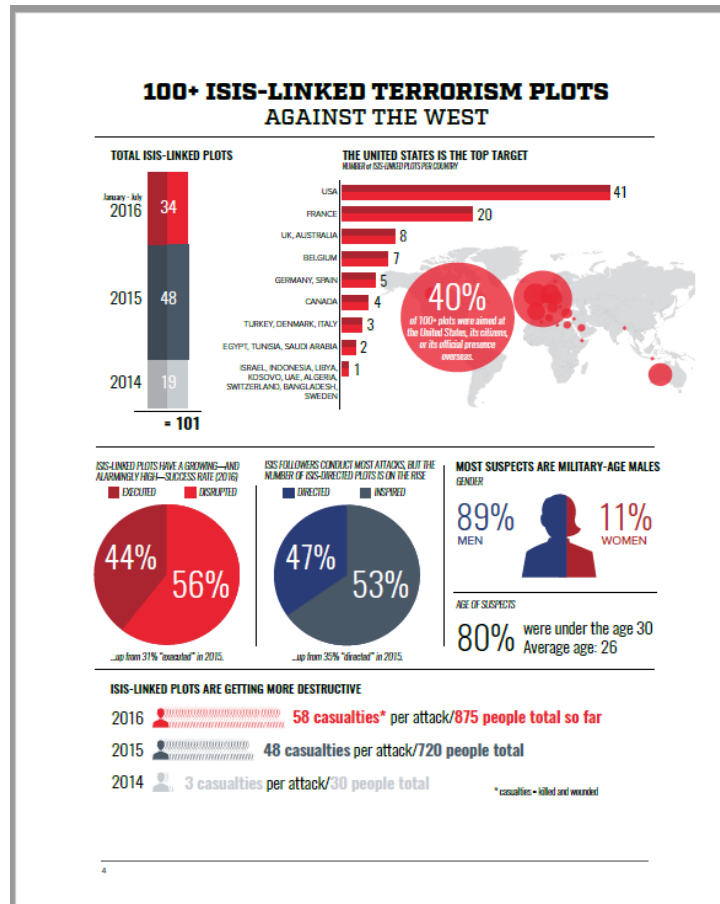
¹⁶⁴ Adam Gabbatt, “Manhattan Subway Explosion ‘Was Attempted Terrorist Attack,’ Says Mayor,” *The Guardian*, December 11, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/dec/11/new-york-police-explosion-reports-manhattan>.

¹⁶⁵ Emanuella Grinberg, “Ohio State University: Attacker Killed, 11 Hospitalized after Campus Attack,” *The Guardian*, November 28, 2011, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/28/us/ohio-state-university-active-shooter/index.htm>.

¹⁶⁶ Shimon Prokupecz, “Note Found near Truck Claims Manhattan Attack Done for ISIS,” *CNN*, October 31, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/10/31/us/new-york-shots-fired/index.html>.

¹⁶⁷ Gabbatt, “Manhattan Subway Explosion.”

Figure 4. 100+ ISIS Linked Terrorism Plots¹⁶⁸



Currently, there are about 900 active investigations of homegrown terrorists who are suspected ISIS supporters.¹⁶⁹ Whereas after 9/11, there have been 103 fatalities from terrorists on U.S. soil, and 90 percent of the individuals involved in Islamist extremist plots in the United States were U.S. citizens, which suggests that the threat tends to be homegrown.¹⁷⁰ Based on reports noted in this thesis and the number of ISIS-inspired arrests during the period from 2014 to 2017, there is an influx of ISIS influence spreading in the United States. The House Homeland Security Committee has tracked ISIS activity after the

¹⁶⁸ Source: Homeland Security Committee, *Terror Gone Viral*.

¹⁶⁹ Bergen et al., *Jihadist Terrorism 16 Years after 9/11*.

¹⁷⁰ John Haltiwanger, "ISIS in America: How Many Times Has the Islamic State Attacked the U.S.," *Newsweek*, December 11, 2017, <https://www.newsweek.com/islamic-state-america-attacks-744497>.

first known plot against the West in 2014. Its report captures ISIS's external operations against the United States and inspired plots. Figure 4 provides a snapshot of ISIS-linked plots and attacks by country since 2013.

D. AMERICANS RECRUITED FOR JIHAD

Americans are being recruited to migrate to jihadist battlefields in Syria to fight with ISIS. Authorities have stopped some Americans on the pathway to jihad, but others have successfully made it to the conflict zones. Some have been killed there, and others have returned to the United States. These American jihadists pose a counterterrorism challenge for the United States. ISIS has motivated the mobilization of extremists in the United States from 2014 to date, and more than 250 Americans have traveled or made an effort to travel overseas to join the Islamic State.¹⁷¹

A small cluster of Americans have become attracted to ISIS's ideology and taken a path supporting ISIS directly on foreign soil. Chapter III outlines the intensity of U.S.-based foreign fighters that have traveled to ISIS battlefield. A cluster of supporters is considered a small informal group of like-minded people with the same beliefs. These clusters are real connections between individuals bound together by a commitment and loyalty to ISIS. These bonds are formed in mosques, student groups, or in counties where there is a diaspora of a specific ethnic group. Groups as these are typically founded in Europe, but also on a significantly smaller scale in the United States, mainly because most ISIS-inspired supporters who are American fall into a lone actor profile. However, individuals who radicalized and mobilized together have a unique and strong connection.¹⁷² A high profile United States case that illustrates this cluster dynamics is known as the Minnesota cluster. The next chapter features 24 individuals who have attempted to travel to join ISIS since 2014; this is the largest cluster identified from this wave of Minnesota ISIS supporters. The actual threat to our nation is homegrown lone wolves or groups of individuals who are inspired by jihadist ideology. Most Americans

¹⁷¹ Bergen et al., *Jihadist Terrorism*.

¹⁷² Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, *ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa* (Washington, DC: Program of Extremism, George Washington University, 2015), <https://extremism.gwu.edu/isis-america>.

believe that foreign terrorists are who plots attacks against America and that an attack could not be conducted by a U.S. citizen, yet Omar Mateen, was born and raised in New York, and he executed the deadliest jihadi-inspired attack since the September 11th attacks.¹⁷³

E. CONCLUSION

The data gathered from studies discussed in this chapter illuminate the complexity of the ISIS homegrown threat and confirm that American political leaders will need to be valiant in both addressing and mitigating this threat. Although other fundamental Islamic-motivated terrorist groups have attracted Westerners for decades, the success of ISIS recruitment and motivation efforts have dramatically increased from 2014 to 2018. For several decades, few Americans have been lured by Islamic extremists waging jihadi, yet ISIS had changed the dynamics with its appeal to capture Americans at an increasing rate.¹⁷⁴ To protect our homeland and people from this increasing threat that homegrown ISIS-inspired terrorists have manifested into our society, our leaders must develop and implement innovative policies and initiatives. Yes, the numbers of deaths from homegrown ISIS-inspired terrorists are relatively low compared to the other threats our national security faces. However, the United States is not resistant to ISIS or the risk it poses.

¹⁷³ Rose, “US Has 1,000 Open ISIS Investigations;” Bergen et al., *Jihadist Terrorism*.

¹⁷⁴ Vidino and Hughes, *ISIS in America*.

III. A SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS OF THE MINNESOTA ISLAMIC STATE CLUSTER

Kinship recruitment suggests that radicalization is a small-group phenomenon whereby valued peers with extremist ideas transpose their extremism onto apolitical individuals within their orbit through social and psychological mechanisms that are devoid of grievances, ideology, or politics, but instead associated with love, trust, and life-long bonding.

—Mohammed M. Hafez¹⁷⁵

This chapter examines a network surrounding a group of Minnesota men who attempted to flee to Syria from 2013 to 2015 to support ISIS. Using public open-source data, I reconstructed the network centered around six codefendants. The reports from which the network data were gleaned included numerous newspaper articles, thousands of pages of legal documents, law enforcement reports, and interviews. Also, the Program on Extremism's landmark 2015 report, *ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa*, provided groundwork information for understanding ISIS followers in the United States.¹⁷⁶ The program also publishes the monthly *The Extremism Tracker*, which details current ISIS activity, and the *Telegram Tracker*, which compiles all pro-ISIS channels on social media.¹⁷⁷ Beginning with six codefendants from the 2015 criminal complaint charging six Minnesota males who conspired together to travel to Syria to join ISIS,¹⁷⁸ the network was initially expanded to include 18 additional Minnesota individuals who are also ISIS supporters. These individuals were linked together by friendship or kinship ties, and they also attempted to or did flee to Syria. An additional 16 individuals were identified as having friendship or kinship ties to the other 24 network members but did not try to join ISIS. Including them in the network brought the total to 40 individuals.

¹⁷⁵ Hafez, "The Ties That Bind," 17.

¹⁷⁶ Vidino and Hughes.

¹⁷⁷ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *The Travelers*.

¹⁷⁸ United States of America v. Mohamed Abdihamid Farah, Adnan Abdihamid Farah, Abdurahman Yasin Daud, Zacharia Yusuf Abdurahman, Hanad Mustafe Musse, and Guled Ali Omar (District Court of Minnesota, 2015), <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Farah%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>.

This chapter proceeds as follows. It explores the significance of the cluster of sympathizers in Minnesota. Next, it draws on social network analysis (SNA) to gain a better understanding of the Minnesota network (see appendix). The chapter concludes with strategies for deterring people from joining ISIS.

A. BACKGROUND

The war on terror and terrorism is of crucial concern to our national security. Since September 11, the U.S. government has spent a substantial amount of resources on terrorism prevention. Additionally, the global war on terror has brought about changes in both our domestic and foreign policies. Many researchers are trying to identify specific trends or patterns that trigger an individual's desire to join a terrorist group.¹⁷⁹ However, one size does not fit all since homegrown terrorists can be potentially radicalized by their grievances, the networks in which they are embedded, or their ideological learnings. In this chapter, I map a network of terrorist supporters in Minnesota who are self-proclaimed jihadists. This network is the first ever to exist where over two dozen individuals can be linked to a specific location—St Paul Minneapolis, Minnesota—who support ISIS.

Minnesota has the largest Somali immigrant cluster, of the 150,000 Somalis who live in the United States,¹⁸⁰ and a 2015 report by the U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security found that Minnesota has the highest number of people attempting to travel to Syria to join ISIS.¹⁸¹ In-depth research and analysis indicate that Minneapolis-St. Paul is a “perfect storm” of citizens who have become radicalized jihadists because of existing networks and past conflicts they have experienced. For example, in 2006, during the invasion of Somalia by Ethiopian forces, a jihadist group known as al-Shabaab surfaced, in Somali, which was plunged into civil war. This caused a ripple effect with many foreign fighters fleeing to Somalia to support al-Shabaab.¹⁸² With its high percentage of Somali

¹⁷⁹ Vidino and Hughes, *ISIS in America*.

¹⁸⁰ Counter Extremism Project, “Guide to Online Propagandists.”

¹⁸¹ Homeland Security Committee, *Final Report of the Task Force*.

¹⁸² Vidino and Hughes, *ISIS in America*.

immigrants, Minnesota was affected by this as well; 23 men from the Twin Cities fled to Somalia from 2007 to 2013 to join al-Shabaab.¹⁸³

Muslims have immigrated to Minnesota since the 1880s with an increase in numbers in the 1990s because of refugees from Somalia, Bosnia, and East Africa.¹⁸⁴ Estimates indicate that as of 2017, 3.45 million Muslims live in the United States (approximately 1.1 percent of the U.S. population).¹⁸⁵ In 2018, the percentage of Minnesota's adult Muslim population was between one and two percent.¹⁸⁶ The inflow of Muslims from Somalia, Bosnia, and East Africa in the 1990s expanded the U.S. Muslim population, primarily in Minnesota.¹⁸⁷ This geographical clustering, plus the peer-to-peer friendships and kinship relationships, radiates the potential for extremism.

The Minnesota jihadi cluster was comprised of the dozens of residents from Minnesota who support ISIS. The network visualizations later in the chapter depict the degree to which the network is interconnected. The ISIS supporters who successfully traveled to Syria also attempted to recruit family and friends back in the United States by contacting them via phone or on social media sites as Facebook message or on Facebook pages.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *The Travelers*, 116.

¹⁸⁴ "Muslims in Minnesota," Minnesota Council of Churches, accessed October 15, 2017, <http://mnchurches.org/respectfulcommunities/interfaithprogramming/takingheart/MuslimsinMinnesota.html>.

¹⁸⁵ Mohamed, "New Estimates Show."

¹⁸⁶ Mohamed.

¹⁸⁷ Minnesota Council of Churches, "Muslims in Minnesota."

¹⁸⁸ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *The Travelers*, 116.

B. SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS—PATTERNS AND UNDERSTANDINGS

A primary goal of SNA has been to develop metrics that help analysts gain a better understanding of a particular network's structural features.¹⁸⁹

—Sean Everton

This section's purpose is to conduct an exploratory SNA of ISIS-inspired homegrown terrorists in the United States. In 1975, military planners realized the SNA approach could be productive in identifying terrorist groups. Witnessing the success of these systems by the military, federal government personnel speculated that the software and identification methods could be useful to law enforcement to disrupt gangs and organized crime rings.¹⁹⁰

Everton defines SNA as “a collection of theories and methods that assumes that the behavior of actors (e.g., individuals, groups, or organizations) is profoundly affected by their ties to others and the networks in which they are embedded.”¹⁹¹ This chapter's analysis maps a network of citizens who have pledged an oath to ISIS and have either left the country to travel to Syria to join the group or were planning to and were caught by authorities before they could depart the United States. In 2014, federal investigators estimated that about 20 young people had left Minnesota to join ISIS.¹⁹² Authorities stopped and arrested many at airports as they tried to leave.

Everton observes, “Social networks not only enable and constrain behavior but that they are also full of meaning and as such help, us make sense of our world, shape our preference and influences the choices we make.”¹⁹³ SNA has become a tool for analysts to

¹⁸⁹ Sean F. Everton, *Disrupting Dark Networks: Structural Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5.

¹⁹⁰ Timothy Crocker, “The Power of Social Network Analysis,” *Police Chief Magazine*, 2017, <http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/power-social-network-analysis/>.

¹⁹¹ Everton, *Disrupting Dark Networks*.

¹⁹² Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *The Travelers*, vii.

¹⁹³ Everton, *Disrupting Dark Networks*, 5.

study the complexities of understanding dynamics among people, and it is especially useful in diagnosing Islamic extremists.¹⁹⁴ Marc Sageman states,

A group of people can be viewed as a network, a collection of nodes connected through links. Some nodes are more popular and attached to more links in which connects them to more isolated nodes. These more connected nodes, called hubs, are important components of terrorist networks.¹⁹⁵

With this in mind, SNA enables us to better understand interaction patterns and behaviors. The work of previous social network analysts, such as Validis Kerbs, who studied the 9/11 hijacker network, and Marc Sageman, who examined 172 Islamic terrorist operatives of the global Salafi jihadis, can be referred to for further analysis.¹⁹⁶

In SNA, the term *actor* “refers to discrete individuals, subgroups, organizations, collectivities, communities, or nation-states involved in social relations.”¹⁹⁷ These actors are linked together by *ties*.¹⁹⁸ The Minnesota jihadi cluster draws upon friendship and biological relations as ties. As this network suggests, actors are clustered within subcategories (friendship, kinship, travelers, and ISIS supporters). Commonly rooted within a subgroup, others serve as a bridge between subgroups.¹⁹⁹

This study examines the complicated relationship of the U.S. citizens who have supported ISIS. Using SNA, it presents a visualization of the network and potential clusters. This visualization, known as a *sociogram*, is built from complex computations. Through quantitative and analytical methodology, these computations display the dynamics of complex relationships.²⁰⁰ Everton states the importance of metrics.

Social network metrics play an important role in analyzing a social network’s dynamics. Density and other related measures can help researchers gain an overall

¹⁹⁴ Everton, 6.

¹⁹⁵ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 137.

¹⁹⁶ Everton, *Disrupting Dark Networks*.

¹⁹⁷ Everton.

¹⁹⁸ Everton.

¹⁹⁹ Everton.

²⁰⁰ Daniel Cunningham, Sean Everton, and Philip J. Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks: A Strategic Framework for the Use of Social Network Analysis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 86.

understanding the overall “shape” of the network (i.e., its topography); centrality measures can help identify key and peripheral actors within a network; clustering algorithms can help locate various subgroups within the larger network (and also provide additional information on the network as a whole); and brokerage measures can help identify actors and ties between actors that serve as channels for the exchange and flow of information and other resources (e.g., financial, affection). Social network analysts generally use a variety of metrics (rather than just one or two) in their attempts to gain an overall understanding of a network.²⁰¹

As noted earlier, beginning with the six codefendants, I expanded the network using primarily friendship and kinship ties. Although I could have used other types of ties to expand the network, existing research suggests that friendship and kinship networks play key roles in the development of terrorist and other types of clandestine networks.²⁰² For instance, Sageman established that the majority that joined the global Salafi jihad were recruited through friendship and kinship ties.²⁰³

Friendship ties appear to be particularly key to the Minnesota network. As Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford note, “Unlike its counterparts, which usually involve isolated groups of two or three members, the Minnesota cluster transcended several friendship and family groups.”²⁰⁴ This cluster mobilized through ties of various friendships, coupled with communication among each other and interconnectivity by in-person contact or through a cell phone or social media message boards. Group members encouraged and enabled each other to travel or support ISIS through illegal online material. Figure 5 presents the Minnesota ISIS cluster’s friendship network where red indicates the original codefendants. The friendship network’s density, which equals the proportion of actual ties over the number of potential ties, is 0.202.

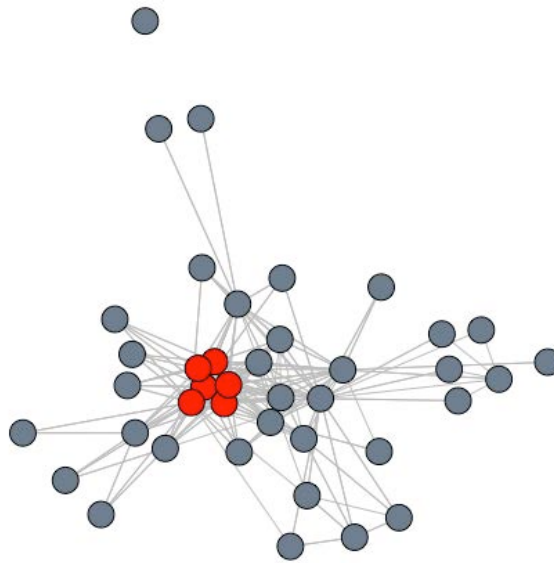
²⁰¹ Sean Everton, *Tracking, Destabilizing and Disrupting Dark Networks with Social Networks Analysis* (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2008), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/34415>.

²⁰² Donatella della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁰³ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*.

²⁰⁴ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *The Travelers*, 53.

Figure 5. Minnesota Cluster Friendship Network

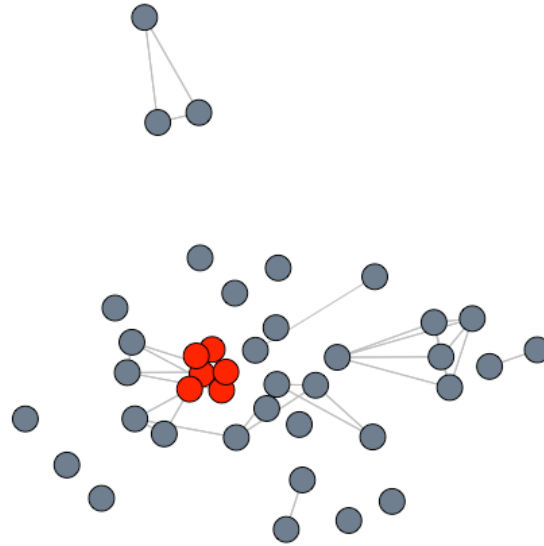


Kinship also plays an essential role in radicalization. As Mohammed Hafez notes, “Kinship recruitment, which is difficult for security agencies to observe, is facilitated by several psychological mechanisms that bind persons together towards extremism.”²⁰⁵ The bond of loyalty strengthens commitments and trust, especially in a radicalization context. Kinship networks are made of individuals who have similar beliefs and a collective identity permitting their interactions to be innocuous.²⁰⁶ The lifelong bond, mixed with love and trust, indicates that this revised concept of the ideology of Islamic extremism allows active recruitment to radicalization. Figure 6 presents the Minnesota ISIS cluster’s kinship network where once again red indicates the original codefendants. The kinship network’s density equals 0.039; this is substantially lower than the friendship network, which indicates that this particular support network is built more on friendship than kinship ties. Of course, we cannot assume that other networks that support ISIS will demonstrate this same pattern.

²⁰⁵ Hafez, “The Ties That Bind.” 17.

²⁰⁶ Hafez.

Figure 6. Minnesota Cluster Kinship Network



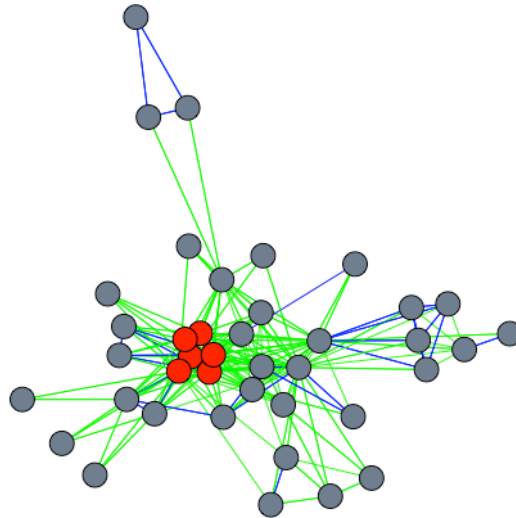
To be included in the network for this research, an individual had to be a resident of Minnesota, have a friendship or kinship tie to at least one of the six codefendants or one of the other 18 ISIS supporters, and meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Arrested for plotting to travel to Syria/Iraq to support ISIS,
- Successfully traveled to Syria/Iraq and fought with ISIS,
- Conspired or attempted to kill abroad in support of a foreign terrorist organization,
- Conspired or attempted to provide material support to ISIS.

Figure 7 presents the combined network. In the figure, the red nodes indicate the six codefendants, green edges indicates friendship ties, and blue edges indicate kinship ties. All the individuals in this network are U.S. citizens from Minnesota and Muslim Americans. Not all are homegrown terrorists, yet their inclusion shows how interconnected

this cluster is. Network total density equals 0.242, which suggests that compared to other dark networks, it is moderately connected.²⁰⁷

Figure 7. Minnesota Cluster Overall Network



This study's purpose is to examine the globalization of ISIS's ideology that has successfully resulted in radicalization and mobilization. Americans declaring an oath to this foreign terrorist organization affects national security. These individuals are Americans who have freely volunteered to wage war against their country (i.e., the United States), to abandon the American way of life, and to support ISIS. They are U.S. citizens who have plotted terrorist attacks within our borders and have declared jihad against the United States.

C. THE MINNESOTA TRAVELERS

Extremists call all Muslims to jihad as an obligation and duty to Islam. As Reynolds and Hafez point out, "Muslim foreign fighters declare their Islamist views as a total 'war on Islam' that tyrannical regimes and foreign enemies threaten to subjugate Muslims."²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Kathryn Oliver, "Covert Networks: Structures, Processes, and Types" (working paper, Mitchell Centre, 2014), http://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/schools/soss/research/mitchell/covertnetworks/wp/working_paper1.pdf.

²⁰⁸ Reynolds and Hafez, "Social Network Analysis," 6.

They also note that “Western jihadists participate in foreign conflicts because they see fighting in Muslim lands as legitimate self-defense, not an act of aggression.”²⁰⁹ Furthermore, the George Washington University report, *The Travelers*, suggests that knowing the flashpoint as to why an individual would radicalize and support ISIS is complex.²¹⁰

In 2007, two dozen individuals from Minnesota with Somali origins left the United States to join al-Shabaab.²¹¹ Known originally as the Minnesota travelers, they were the first cluster in the United States to flee to become foreign fighters. The group analyzed in this chapter is the second. As noted earlier, beginning with six individuals convicted for attempting to travel to Syria in order to join ISIS, I identified an additional 18 individuals connected to these six through friendship or kinship ties and who either fled or attempted to flee to Syria to become foreign fighters. According to Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford,

The Minnesotan contingent in Syria and Iraq is well documented. The court cases against the ten unsuccessful travelers revealed a wealth of information regarding other Twin Cities residents who successfully traveled. A U.S. House of Representatives Homeland Security Committee report found that more than one-quarter of successful and unsuccessful U.S. travelers came from Minnesota. During a 2015 press conference, then-U.S. Attorney Andrew Luger, responsible for prosecuting the majority of Minnesota’s IS-related cases, was more direct in his assessment: We have a terror recruiting problem in Minnesota.²¹²

The first foreign fighters who headed to Syria from Minnesota began recruitment internally with their friends and family in the United States. Former U.S. Attorney Andrew Luger described this as, “a recruiting strategy as a ‘peer-to-peer’, ‘brother-to-brother’ approach, noting, the person radicalizing your son, your brother, your friend, may not be a stranger. It may be their best friend right here in town.”²¹³ Figure 8 depicts the network

²⁰⁹ Reynolds and Hafez, 3.

²¹⁰ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *The Travelers*, 85.

²¹¹ George Washington University, “Program of Extremism.”

²¹² Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *The Travelers*, 116.

²¹³ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, 116.

with the nodes colored by whether or not they attempted to travel to Syria in order to join ISIS. Red nodes indicate the original six codefendants, purple nodes (14) indicate those who successfully traveled to Syria, green (4) indicate those who attempted (but failed) to travel to Syria, and gray (16) indicates individuals who are associated through kinship and friendship ties but did not attempt to travel to Syria; it is unknown whether they are ISIS supporters.

Figure 8. Combined Minnesota Cluster Network Colored by Traveler Status

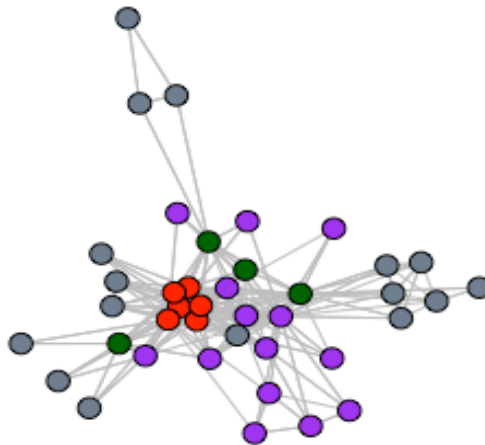


Table 1 summarizes the average centrality scores of network members, broken down by their traveler status. Degree centrality is a count of the number of ties of an actor; betweenness centrality indicates the extent to which actors lie between other actors in the network; closeness measures how close, on average, each actors is to every other actor in the network; and eigenvector captures the degree to which actors are connected to other well-connected actors. Table 1 illustrates that the six original codefendants score highest on three out of the four measures. This is unsurprising since the construction of this network began with these six individuals; thus, we would expect them to be the most central. However, it is interesting that those who attempted to travel (whether successfully or not) score much higher in terms of centrality than those who did not attempt to travel. We know from previous research that individuals who are on the periphery of a group (in this case,

the “non-travelers”) are less likely to ascribe to the group’s norms,²¹⁴ so these results indicate that those who were more weakly tied to the core of the Minnesota cluster were less likely to be influenced by those who wanted to join ISIS in Syria. However, they still could have been able to exert an influence on core members, which suggests that a possible course of action would have been to identify individuals on the periphery as possible “entry” points for diminishing the group’s enthusiasm for joining ISIS.

Table 1. Minnesota Cluster Centrality Measure

	Average Degree (Raw)	Average Betweenness (Normalized)	Average Closeness (Normalized)	Average Eigenvector (Normalized)
Codefendants	19.50	0.054	0.657	0.385
Attempted to Travel	15.50	0.082	0.597	0.291
Successfully Traveled	8.50	0.023	0.530	0.167
Non-travelers	5.00	0.004	0.443	0.086

To consider a strategy design to assist law enforcement in considering potential actions plans to thwart the process of radicalization of terrorist supporters in the United States, the U.S. government should consider game theory. The Minnesota cluster shows a small cell in the United States that formed together to engage in terrorism; however, on the broader scale, over 30,000 foreign fighters traveled to Syria to join ISIS (only approximately 129²¹⁵ from the U.S., however). What accounts for their behavior?

Thomas Schelling introduced the world to his “theory of strategy,” an adaptation of game theory to the world of international relations. In his book, *The Strategy of Conflict*, Schelling coined the concept of a “focal

²¹⁴ For example, see Pamela A. Popielarz, and J. Miller McPherson, “On the Edge or in Between: Niche Position, Niche Overlap, and the Duration of Voluntary Association Memberships,” *American Journal of Sociology* 101, no. 3 (1995):698–720; Sean F. Everton, *Networks and Religion: Ties the Bind, Loose, Build-up, and Tear Down* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 116–120.

²¹⁵ Richard Barrett, *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees* (New York: Soufan Center, 2017), <http://thesoufancenter.org/research/beyond-caliphate/>.

point” (now known as a “Schelling point”) to describe how individuals and nations reach an agreement when bargaining with each other. The process involves anticipating what the other person or country might do.²¹⁶

The next chapter discusses considerations for policymakers in designing strategies that undercuts ISIS’s ability to recruit and the core of Islamic radicalization in the United States.

D. CONCLUSION

ISIS’ media strategy is like its military strategy; intentional, broad, comprehensive, and most of all patient.

—Craig Whiteside, *Lighting the Path*²¹⁷

This chapter presented an overview of a cluster of American foreign fighters who are ISIS supporters. The Minnesota jihadi cluster shows how individuals are interconnected with others via relationships, religion, and ethnicity as well as a shared set of grievances, namely the perception that the United States is at war with Islam. SNA can identify links and the depth of connectedness, which can assist authorities in arresting potential terrorists or in their deradicalization efforts. This chapter’s analysis highlights the need for further community engagement programs in at-risk communities, to stop the active appeal extremists have within this population. In particular, it demonstrated that those who attempted to join ISIS were located more at the core of the network than those who did not, suggesting that those on the periphery could have been used by authorities to counter the group’s enthusiasm for joining ISIS. It is important to note, however, that this analysis is not conclusive because the main problem with open-source data is the incompleteness of information, especially in dark networks, as homegrown terrorists. Just as importantly, it only examines a single network of individuals who attempted to flee to Syria from 2013 to 2015 to support ISIS; we cannot assume that other ISIS-related networks in the U.S. are structured in the same way.

²¹⁶ Jacob Olidort, “The Game Theory of Terrorism: How ISIS Radicalizes Others,” *Foreign Affairs*, December 10, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-12-10/game-theory-terrorism>.

²¹⁷ Whiteside, *Lighting the Path*.

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IV. USING GAME THEORY TO ANALYZE U.S. CITIZENS WHO SUPPORT THE ISLAMIC STATE

First, if the insurgency is able to maintain a positive rate of growth, over time it will eventually reach the point where it can either defeat or displace its opponent. Second, if its net rate of growth after attrition stabilizes short of what is needed to win, but is still sufficient to allow it to stay in the game, the conflict can continue indefinitely. This will not change until the underlying parameters of the struggle change in a way that gives one side or the other a game-winning advantage, or changing political circumstances permit the players to achieve a negotiated ending. Finally, if the original charter group is unable to grow much beyond the size of its opening membership, it will not pose a significant political challenge. It may continue to be a political irritant, until defeated, without ever becoming big enough to pose a threat. When it comes to waging an internal war, as the saying goes, size matters.

—Gordon McCormick and Frank Giordano²¹⁸

The threat of homegrown ISIS-inspired terrorist in the United States is complicated. Focusing on counter-radicalization efforts between local communities and federal authorities could decrease the potential for recruitment. The Minnesota cluster, a group of Americans who have become foreign fighters, highlights a specific location (Minnesota) as a place where community efforts to decrease recruitment could prevent radicalization. To offer policymakers possible solutions and policy recommendations, this chapter uses a game theory model to demonstrate that if the U.S. government decreases counter violence extremism (CVE) funding, it could affect national security. Domestic CVE efforts focusing on deradicalization and disengagement within community engagement programs have the best chance of showing an effective strategy. For example, The Program on Extremism stated, “CVE is a delicate tool that, if properly implemented, can help sway young people away from radicalizing. Apart from saving lives, prevention programs outside law enforcement allow law enforcement and intelligence agencies to better concentrate their resources on those who have made the leap into violent militancy.”²¹⁹ Current CVE efforts in the United States

²¹⁸ McCormick and Giordano, “Things Come Together.”

²¹⁹ *Combatting Homegrown Terrorism*.

should pivot to lessons learned from faults and accomplishments to develop a program that reduces the threat of ISIS radicalization of U.S. citizens.²²⁰ Since 2013, the NCTC, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), and the FBI have focused on engaging with local communities identified as vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by violent jihadists throughout the United States to enhance community outreach initiatives and implement counterterrorism efforts.

A. THE DILEMMA: HOMEGROWN TERRORISTS INSPIRED BY JIHADIST IDEOLOGY

Through exploration of game theory methods, this chapter examines the possible consequences of decreasing funding for CVE and other community-based programming and the potential effects it will have on homegrown terrorists recruiting efforts. The threat of homegrown terrorists is substantial and mandates that the United States implement strategic initiatives to protect the nation. ISIS has proven its ability to lure people to become sympathizers, travel aboard, and plot attacks to further its agenda. ISIS has used the Internet, including various social media platforms, to launch informational campaigns that reaches beyond boundaries and borders with propaganda that appeals to multiple audiences, and through these efforts, it has gained recruits.

The nation is not winning against Islamic extremism, despite our counterterrorism measures. There are more jihadi fighters and battlefields today than any other time in history, and some of those fighters have come from the United States.²²¹ The threat environment today is fragile and vulnerable because terrorists are recruiting and promoting on multiple platforms, such as the Internet and person-to-person within communities. Counterterrorism efforts and initiatives require resources, which are costly. However, adequate funding and resources must remain a priority towards domestic terrorism prevention programs and policies in order to safeguard American citizens'.²²² Ultimately,

²²⁰ Eric Rosand, "Fixing CVE in the United States Requires More Than Just a Name Change," Brookings Institute, February 16, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/02/16/fixing-cve-in-the-uni>.

²²¹ Homeland Security Committee, *Terror Gone Viral*.

²²² *Combating Homegrown Terrorism*.

collaboration involving the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as both state and local governments, is necessary to adequately protect the nation from ISIS or Islamic extremism recruitment and radicalization. In 2011, the U.S. government created a national strategic plan to address domestic CVE within the federal government. CVE introduced cooperative measures between individual communities, religious leaders, health-service employees, and law enforcement.²²³ DHS defines CVE as “proactive actions to counter efforts by extremists to recruit, radicalize, and mobilize followers to violence.”²²⁴ CVE was designed to deter U.S. citizens from joining violent extremist groups and provide information, awareness, and resources into vulnerable communities.

B. DOMESTIC COUNTERTERRORISM IN AMERICA

The events after 9/11 changed the U.S. government’s counterterrorism community. In her article “Preventing the Next Attack,” Monaco explains,

Determined to “connect the dots” in the future, the U.S. government created new agencies and instituted a new paradigm for intelligence—share by rule, withhold by exception—and set up a slew of “fusion centers” and joint task forces to foster interagency cooperation. Borders were hardened, cockpit doors reinforced, and watch lists created.²²⁵

In light of this evolving threat, the question becomes, what is the right strategy to use to counteract this new phase of terrorism when the threat comes from a wide array of individuals without a specific profile and no way to determine if the potential danger lies with a radicalized lone wolf or a radicalized cluster of people with the intent to create disaster on American or foreign soil.

In 2011, DHS released an initiative entitled *Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*,²²⁶ which represents a strategy the USG uses to empower and assist local communities in the prevention of violent extremism. With the

²²³ Rosand, “Fixing CVE in the United States.”

²²⁴ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Countering Violent Extremism Task Force.”

²²⁵ Monaco, “Preventing the Next Attack.”

²²⁶ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Countering Violent Extremism Task Force.”

evolving threat of violent extremists in 2016, the administration released the *Strategic Implementation Plan* (SIP),²²⁷ which reflected on the dynamics of the previous five years in the prevention of violent extremism. The 2016 SIP is designed to prevent recruitment and radicalization among vulnerable individuals who are susceptible to becoming influenced and motivated by radical Islamic ideology.²²⁸ These efforts are through the following lines of effort, enhancing engagement with support to local communities, building government and law enforcement expertise for preventing violent extremism, and countering violent extremist propaganda while promoting our ideals.²²⁹ The purpose of SIP is to prevent the development and proliferation of violent extremist threats that continue to evolve on U.S. soil.

The terrorist threat that the nation faces does not come from individuals outside of our borders; it comes from homegrown U.S. citizens that have been increasingly influenced by ISIS and other extreme Islamic ideologies. Since 2001 and because of the events that took place on 9/11, the United States has pioneered cutting-edge counterterrorism tactics and strategies to safeguard our citizens and borders, and it has become the world's counterterrorism leader at significant fiscal cost. Since 9/11, the discretionary budget spends 16 percent on counterterrorism efforts and incorporates homeland security, international programs, and in conflict regions, such as Iraq and Syria; the overall total has been 2.8 trillion dollars.²³⁰ In 2017, approximately \$174 billion was spent on counterterrorism efforts. In comparison, this yearly average exceeds what the U.S. government spent combined annually for the Korean and Vietnam Wars.²³¹

Since September 11, 2001, significant actions have been implemented by the United States to disrupt terrorists to ensure the nation is protected. Our nation's efforts have

²²⁷ U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

²²⁸ U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

²²⁹ U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

²³⁰ Dylan Matthews, "Trump's 2019 Budget: What He Cuts, How Much He Cuts, and Why It Matters," *Vox*, February 12, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/2/12/16996832/trump-budget-2019-release-explained>.

²³¹ Aaron Mehta, "Here's How Much the US Has Spent Fighting Terrorism Since 9/11," *Defense News*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2018/05/16/heres-how-much-the-us-has-spent-fighting-terrorism-since-911/>.

been remarkable. However, despite the trillions of dollars the U.S. government has spent on counterterrorism efforts, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan domestically and internationally to protect the homeland, homegrown terrorists, radicalized by Islamist groups, such as ISIS, remain a threat to the United States. Individuals who become radicalized are nearly impossible for the U.S. government and law enforcement agencies to detect because they have no easily identified triggers, many have been lone-wolves, most have never been to a foreign country (much less a conflict area), and few have had any tactical training.

In 2011, the government established the Countering Violent Extremism Task Force (CVETF) to unify all agencies on the CVE frontline. The purpose of the CVETF is to connect people, ideas, and opportunities relating to counterterrorism. The task force's mission statement is "to manage the synchronization and integration of a whole-of-government effort to empower local partners to prevent violent extremism in the United States."²³² The following departments and agencies, charged with continuing to execute this strategy, support the CVETF: DHS, Department of Justice, DOS, DOD, Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Labor, the FBI, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and NCTC.²³³ George Selim, Director of the DHS's Office for Community Partnerships and the head of the CVE program, has described CVE as "the first federal assistance program devoted exclusively to providing local communities with the resources to counter violent extremism in the homeland that supports new and existing community-based efforts to counter violent extremist recruitment and radicalization to violence."²³⁴ However, since the resignation of George Selim in 2018, significant budget cuts for community organizations within the CVE program, and the reevaluation of the program, has caused the future of community engagement programs within CVE to be unknown at this time.

²³² U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Countering Violent Extremism Task Force."

²³³ U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

²³⁴ Robin Simcox, "Finding and Funding the Best Way to Fight Terrorism," Heritage Foundation, July 17, 2017, <https://www.heritage.org/terrorism/commentary/finding-and-funding-the-best-ways-fight-terrorism>.

In late 2016, President Obama approved \$10 million of grant funding for a total of 31 organizations in support of CVE.²³⁵ This finding is significant to DHS and its specific objectives of deradicalization and recruitment prevention. However, when President Trump's administration took office in 2017, it reevaluated and assessed all programs and initiatives across the federal government and implemented budget cuts. Although this assessment process kept the \$10 million in grant funding, it dissolved the financing of four organizations within the homeland security department of CVE.²³⁶ The pivot of this decision shifted grants from community engagement efforts to funding mainly efforts of law enforcement and other government agencies. The current administration's decrease in funding for DHS programs aimed at CVE community deradicalization efforts with community engagement programs is unfortunate because the program was designed to engage Muslim communities where the population is at high risk for recruitment and radicalization.²³⁷ Community engagement programs within Muslim communities at risk for ISIS recruitment and radicalization have the potential to foster positive influence regarding disengagement with ISIS efforts.

There are no easy solutions. The government needs to address the national debt, law enforcement does still require additional funding, and the government needs to dissolve homegrown terrorism. However, studies have proven that an effective method to counter homegrown terrorism is through engagement in the communities with family members and religious leaders.²³⁸

C. GAME THEORY

Game theory is the science of decision making. In a 2012 chapter entitled "Game Theory Application on Terrorism," Pavelková states,

²³⁵ Simcox, "Finding and Funding the Best Way."

²³⁶ Simcox.

²³⁷ Simcox.

²³⁸ Benjamin Powers, "Losing Hearts and Minds: How Trump Quietly Guttled a Program to Combat Homegrown Extremists," *New Republic*, September 11, 2017, <https://newrepublic.com/article/144534/losing-hearts-minds-trump-quietly-guttled-program-combat-homegrown-extremists>.

The concept of the game in modern Game Theory has a very general meaning, but applies to any situation of conflict between individuals, companies, armies, states, political parties, and biological species.²³⁹

Game theory uses not only a scientific, mathematical apparatus but also psychology and economics concepts as well. The objective of game theory is to identify a strategy based on the analysis of a set of situations to determine the optimal approach. Ultimately, game theory in a specific circumstance comes down to the interacting players changing strategies to create countermeasures.²⁴⁰ The players can be either individual or a group, considering multiple decisions, and choosing to execute a particular plan.

Game theory applications rest on several necessary assumptions: a) players are rational; b) all parties know the rules of the game; and c) players have an overview of the values in the game and are aware of the number of gains and losses. Through game theory, this thesis analyzes the question is the use of domestic measures intended to counter violent extremism a viable strategic option to decrease radicalization and disengage homegrown terrorists?

1. Assumptions

As an interagency task force, CVETF was designed to coordinate strategic efforts to thwart the threat of violent extremism. The primary approaches of CVE efforts contribute to mitigating the risk of homegrown terrorists are the assumptions for the development of this game theory. These assumptions develop the matrix of the outcomes of the partial conflict game between the U.S. government and the homegrown terrorists.

According to DHS, the critical efforts toward CVE programming include:²⁴¹

Building capacity of government and civil society to design and carry out national CVE dialogues, strategies, and action plans;

²³⁹ Drahomíra Pavelková, “Game Theory Application on Terrorism,” in *Advances in Economics, Risk Management, Political and Law Science: Proceedings of the 1st WSEAS International Conference on Economics, Political, and Law Science* (Zlin, Czech Republic: Tomas Bata University, 2012).

²⁴⁰ Pavelková, “Game Theory.”

²⁴¹ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Countering Violent Extremism Task Force.”

Strengthening CVE efforts through local and municipal actors;

Enhancing civil society's role in CVE efforts, particularly among youth, women, and religious leaders;

Counter-messaging and promoting alternative narratives; and

Addressing radicalization in and through the criminal justice sector, such as through police-community engagement, diversion programs, and juvenile justice.²⁴²

To mitigated radicalization and recruitment of Islamic extremism in the United States CVE efforts have strived towards prevention efforts. For domestic counterterrorism efforts, CVE strategies have been geared to community building prevention objectives.

2. The Game

It is essential to understand the set-up of the game so as to identify how the options relate to one another. Using letters A, B, C, and D to symbolize the possible options, Table 2 illustrates how each option combines to produce a result wherein A represents United States Government (USG) increase CVE funding, B represents USG decrease CVE funding, C represents homegrown terrorists (HGT) increase recruiting efforts, and D represents HGT decrease recruiting efforts.

For the homegrown terrorists, increase and/or decrease recruiting measures were determined—because ISIS recruiters are also American citizens. If increased measures within CVE are community-based in at-risk populations within the United States, these communities would have information that targets prevention and disengagements programs. This effect would cause the recruiter within those communities to decrease efforts, because of the possibility of being investigated or arrested by law enforcement.

²⁴² U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Table 2. U.S. Government versus Homegrown Terrorists

		Homegrown Terrorists	
		C	D
U.S. Government	A	2 AC 3 USG increase CVE funding HGT increase recruiting efforts	3 AD 1 USG increase CVE funding HGT decrease recruiting efforts
	B	1 BC 4 USG decrease CVE funding HGT increase recruiting efforts	4 BD 2 USG decrease CVE funding HGT decrease recruiting efforts

There are four possible results:

- AC = USG increases CVE funding; HGT increases recruiting efforts
- AD = USG increases CVE funding; HGT decreases recruiting efforts
- BC = USG decreases CVE funding; HGT increases recruiting efforts
- BD = USG decreases CVE funding; HGT decreases recruiting efforts

3. U.S. Government Options

On a scale 4-to-1, with 4 as the best payoff and 1 as the worst payoff, this thesis assumes the rankings illustrated in Table 2 of USG CVE efforts to decrease homegrown terrorists recruiting efforts.

Table 3. U.S. Government Payout Options

4 BD = Best choice—USG decreases CVE funding; HGT decreases recruiting efforts
3 AD = Next best—USG increases CVE funding; HGT decreases recruiting efforts
2 AC = Least best—USG increases CVE funding; HGT increases recruiting efforts
1 BC = Worst—USG decreases CVE funding; HGT increases recruiting efforts

4. Homegrown Jihadi Terrorists

On a scale of 4-to-1, with 4 as the best option and 1 as the worst option, this thesis assumes the rankings illustrated in Table 3 for homegrown terrorists to increase recruiting efforts.

Table 4. Homegrown Jihadi Terrorist Payout Options

4 BC= Best choice—HGT increases recruiting efforts; USG decreases CVE funding
3 AC= Next best—HGT increases recruiting efforts; USG increases CVE funding
2 BD= Least best—HGT decreases recruiting efforts; USG decreases CVE funding
1 AD= Worst—HGT decreases recruiting efforts; USG increases CVE funding

Regulating the utility of any of these rankings is problematic. The cardinal utility method is applied to identify the measurable scale. Used in this game, four is the best with one being the worse.²⁴³

5. U.S. Government versus Homegrown Terrorists—Short-Term Tactical Model

Based on the rankings and assumptions above, a game can be established to identify potential outcomes for each player. Table 4 shows the matrix of the game using letters and numbers to demonstrate how each option can combine with others to produce a result. The game's matrix uses the arrows (USG blue and HGT red) to illustrate the direction each side would shift based on its opponent's objectives.

²⁴³ Philip Straffin, *Game Theory and Strategy* (Washington, DC: Mathematical Association of America, 1993).

Table 5. Short-Term Tactical Model Matrix

			Homegrown Terrorists	
			Increased Recruiting Efforts	Decrease Recruiting Efforts
			C	D
U.S. Government	Increase CVE Funding	A	2,3 (AC)	3,1 (AD)
	Decreases CVE Funding	B	1,4 (BC)	4,2 (BD)

The diagram illustrates the strategic interaction between the U.S. Government and Homegrown Terrorists. Red curved arrows indicate the best response for Homegrown Terrorists: from (A,C) to (A,D) and (B,D), and from (B,C) to (A,C). Blue curved arrows indicate the best response for the U.S. Government: from (A,C) to (B,C) and (A,D) to (B,D). The outcome (1,4) for strategy pair (B,C) is highlighted in a green oval, representing the Nash equilibrium.

The matrix in Table 4 represents a short-term tactical concept in how to prioritize funding toward terrorism in the United States. The matrix shows the homegrown terrorists' objective of continuous activity and U.S. government's objective of counterterrorism. In the model, the U.S. government does not have a dominant strategy, whereas the homegrown terrorists do have a dominant strategy of C (increased recruiting efforts). Assuming that the government plays its maximum beneficial strategy, its choice would be B (decrease CVE funding). The Nash equilibrium determines the result of the expected payoffs²⁴⁴ and suggests that if the government continues to decrease funding and resources to counterterrorism efforts, homegrown terrorists would be able to increase their recruitment efforts. Overall, the homegrown terrorists' scope of operations would develop dramatically. The Nash equilibrium in this matrix who not be the best choice for the U.S. government.

Game theory's value in this application helps provide insights about advantages or disadvantages in the nation's allocation of more funding and resources for CVE. For example, Eckland writes in his thesis, "Personnel Recovery,"

If a unique equilibrium does exist, one can then evaluate the point to determine if it is Pareto optimal. If no Nash equilibrium exists, neither player would want to play a single strategy with certainty, for the other

²⁴⁴ The Nash equilibrium is a point at which no player can benefit by departing unilaterally from his strategy, which is associated with an outcome.

player could take advantage of such a choice. After assigning cardinal values, one can then recalculate both players' security levels and determine the SQ [status quo] point to ascertain the game's prudential or mixed-strategy equilibrium solution.²⁴⁵

The concept of this game neither indicates the absolute value of future events nor predicts them. However, it does offer projections of outcomes that could affect decision making. To determine if these maximin strategies are a stable outcome, the researcher must establish security levels, status quo, and dominant strategies. Overall, each player seeks to optimize his move based on his security level.

D. POTENTIAL PLANNING APPROACHES

Prudential security strategy is the two isolated constant-sum games for each player by both row and column. The plan the opposing player considers will either equalize or give a loss to himself to beat his opponent. The row player will maximize as the column player minimizes.²⁴⁶ This is the opposite for the column player when he maximizes; this is also known as a player's *security level*. To determine the player's security value is to maximize the outcome while the other player is attempting to minimize his opponent's result.

The Pareto optimal is defined by plotting the points that set the game's feasible region. This area becomes the solution of the game, and players should consider nothing outside this area in their calculations. This area ensures the players have a guarantee that they can do neither worse nor better.²⁴⁷ Applying the prudential strategies also enables planners to consider other approaches. As Ecklund remarks,

In the unlikely case that the players could reach an agreement in advance, especially if they had little confidence in the trustworthiness of their opponents, they would have every justification to try to protect themselves

²⁴⁵ Marshall Ecklund, *Personnel Recovery: Using Game Theory to Model Strategic Decision Making in the Contemporary Operating Environment* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2004).

²⁴⁶ Ecklund, *Personnel Recovery*.

²⁴⁷ Ecklund.

from opponents reneging on the agreement by reneging on the agreement themselves.²⁴⁸

As in the example, this chapter uses, if the U.S. government follows the maximin strategy B (decrease funding), the matrix confirms that the government would have an outcome of 1 (worst) and that homegrown terrorists would have an outcome of 4 (best). The result clearly favors the homegrown terrorists.

This outcome confirms that increase funding is necessary for domestic counterterrorism efforts to ensure that the immediate threat to the United States with homegrown terrorist is prevented and disrupted. The funding is required to avert homegrown terrorist recruiting efforts and potential decrease radicalization.

1. Continuous Operations War of Attrition Model

The matrix model in Table 6 represents a war of attrition model. The homegrown terrorists continuously cause economic expenses; however, the U.S. government fights terrorism at minimum cost by only reacting when necessary.

Table 6. War of Attrition Matrix

			Homegrown Terrorists	
			Increased Recruiting efforts	Decrease Recruiting Efforts
			C	D
USG	Increase CVE Funding	A	3,2	2,3
	Decreases CVE Funding	B	1,4	4,1

The military strategy of attrition warfare is to break down the enemy by eliminating its resources. For example, the United States used this approach in the Vietnam War, under

²⁴⁸ Ecklund.

President Johnson's directive to General William Westmoreland, the Commander of the U.S. Military Assistance Command in Vietnam. General Westmoreland's attrition strategy inflicted heavy losses on North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces through greater firepower. However, the cost of prevention was detrimental to the United States budget. Years later, the U.S. government has spent billions in the last two decades on counterterrorism. For example, the FBI budget for counterterrorism and intelligence is \$1.9 billion, and DOJ to target and disrupt homegrown threats had a \$14 million budget in 2017.²⁴⁹ The U.S. national debt is a primary concern for President Trump, the U.S. government, and American citizens. However, funding for the prevention of homegrown terrorists is necessary to protect America from individuals using pressure cookers as explosive devices and vehicles as weapons to mow down innocent citizens walking down the streets as well as the preventing the radicalization of individuals who want to leave the United States and travel abroad to a conflict occupied foreign land to wage jihad in support of ISIS.

2. New Technology and Technique—Using a Three-Strategy Game

Social and political games typically involve more than two players. The addition of the status quo, an *n-person* game, wherein *n* is assumed to be the third player; this illustrates results with another player. This strategy is positioned in a three-dimensional array using the Nash equilibrium. In a game with $n \geq 2$ players, simultaneously and independently, the players choose between either option, X, and Y.²⁵⁰ Table 7 shows a proposed third-strategy solution named “new technology and technique.”

²⁴⁹ Harris, “Why Do American Go Aboard?” 4.

²⁵⁰ Philip Straffin, *Game Theory and Strategy* (Washington, DC: Mathematical Association of America, 1993).

Table 7. New Technology and Technique Matrix

		HGT		
		Increase Recruiting	Status Quo	Decrease Recruiting
USG	Increase Funding	7,1	8,2	9,3
	Status Quo	4,6	5,5	6,4
	Decrease Funding	1,9	2,8	3,7

The matrix shows the following payoffs (USG, HGT):

- (Increase Funding, Increase Recruiting): 7,1
- (Increase Funding, Status Quo): 8,2
- (Increase Funding, Decrease Recruiting): 9,3 (Nash Equilibrium)
- (Status Quo, Increase Recruiting): 4,6
- (Status Quo, Status Quo): 5,5
- (Status Quo, Decrease Recruiting): 6,4
- (Decrease Funding, Increase Recruiting): 1,9
- (Decrease Funding, Status Quo): 2,8
- (Decrease Funding, Decrease Recruiting): 3,7

Best response arrows:

- USG (Blue):** From (7,1) to (9,3), from (4,6) to (9,3), from (1,9) to (2,8), from (8,2) to (9,3), from (5,5) to (9,3), from (6,4) to (9,3).
- HGT (Red):** From (7,1) to (8,2), from (8,2) to (9,3), from (4,6) to (5,5), from (5,5) to (6,4), from (1,9) to (2,8), from (2,8) to (3,7), from (3,7) to (2,8), from (6,4) to (5,5).

Table 7 assumes that the U.S. government increases CVE with a concentration on a strategy invoking sophisticated technologies. The Nash equilibrium is 9,3 with a U.S. government-dominant strategy increase, while the homegrown terrorists have no dominant strategy.

E. CONCLUSION

As the results of this game theory exercise demonstrate, if the U.S. government decreases CVE funding, it will damage the country's national security. The question the game asked is countering violent extremism domestically a viable strategic option to deradicalize and disengage homegrown terrorists? The answer is, yes, absolutely. Domestic CVE efforts focused on deradicalization and disengagement have the best chance of effectiveness. In testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Oversight and Government Reform on July 27, 2017, Seamus Hughes, Deputy Director of the Program on Extremism at the George Washington University, explained,

The current administration's proposed budget significantly curtails CVE funding. Moreover, the proposed budget cuts reduce the number of employees at DHS and other agencies that can serve on the CVE taskforce,

limiting the possibility that interagency cooperation will result in innovative program design and management in the future.²⁵¹

CVE in the United States needs funding and improvement. Moreover, CVE focus needs to be on applying lessons learned to develop a program to reduce the CVE threat. Since 2013, the NCTC, the DOJ, and the FBI have focused on engaging communities. However, due to lack of community trust in the agency, the FBI has a poor reputation for its efforts. In 2016, the FBI launched “Don’t Be a Puppet: Pull Back the Curtain on Violent Extremism,” a website informing young adults about propaganda messaging and encouraging resistance to recruitment. Unfortunately, the program suffered so much criticism from community groups and civil rights leaders, who expressed concern that such a program would increase ideological policing and surveillance efforts.²⁵² In Rosand’s article “Fixing CVE in the United States Requires More Than Just a Name Change,” he makes the point that the prison system has become an incubator for violent extremism. He describes,

The Bureau of Prisons can be faulted for not doing enough. Despite the growing number of people sent to federal prison for non-violent terrorism charges (over 300 since 9/11, with more than 90 individuals charged with mostly non-violent ISIS-related offenses, and 40 or so to be released in the next two to four years), the United States, unlike many countries in Europe (and increasingly beyond), has yet to put in place tailored plans for their rehabilitation inside jail or reintegration once they are released.²⁵³

Overall, CVE is stumbling because of lack of resources and coordination efforts through the involved agencies. The efforts indicated in DHS goals need to have measures of effectiveness with reachable attainable measures of performance. None of these obstacles are insurmountable, and the prevention of jihadi radicalizing is too vital of a threat, that it can not be ignored. For the U.S. government to continue to prevent the threat of homegrown terrorists, DHS needs to have its representatives fully trained and funded to protect the homeland from this insider threat so as to mitigate any vulnerabilities for

²⁵¹ *Combatting Homegrown Terrorism.*

²⁵² Rosand, “Fixing CVE in the United States.”

²⁵³ Rosand.

potential attacks. Increased funding for CVE efforts and community-based programs are measures that the government needs to take to avoid increased recruitment and radicalization, which pose significant threats to Americans and the nation.

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V. SUMMARY OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

It is often assumed that social movements and insurgencies emerge when individuals become angry enough about some social condition that they organize in order to bring about change. While there is certainly an element of truth in this assumption, in most societies there are plenty of individuals dissatisfied with the status quo, but few become activists or form a social movement. Instead, other factors need to fall into place before a social movement can emerge.

—Sean Everton²⁵⁴

Understanding the increasing threat of homegrown ISIS-inspired citizens and incorporating additional policy solutions are necessary for the United States to continue to remain safe. Support for ISIS is distributed in sharp clusters across the United States, and these communities are at a higher risk, where initiatives are needed nationwide to raise community awareness to keep individuals from succumbing to recruitment. Budget constraints and limited resources has the potential to limit success to decrease this threat and to spread awareness that prevents future violence.

A. PROPOSITIONS

The significance of past conflicts, Muslim injustices, social media, and a call of duty all have relevance in the mobilization and recruitment of the radicalization of homegrown terrorists. Past conflicts within the Muslim world have affected individuals, and jihadist recruiters use this to their advantage to recruit as the Minnesota cluster proves. The Internet has ultimately transformed the visibility of jihad sympathizers making them and their message more prominent and accessible than ever before. Some Muslims believe they must fight for Islam and that Islam needs to be protected against nonbelievers.

²⁵⁴ Sean F. Everton, “Social Movement Theory,” in *Gangs and Guerrillas: Ideas from Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism*, ed. Michael Freeman (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2011).

1. Past Conflicts and Muslim Injustices

In 1993 during Somalia's civil war, the United States helped the Somalian government with security and humanitarian efforts through Operation Restore Hope.²⁵⁵ During that time, Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda had insignificant influences as far as inspiring terrorist attacks as they were trailing tribes in the area to fight the United Nations and U.S. forces. Al-Shabaab is a known terrorist organization in Somalia, and it attracted an extraordinary number of American jihadists in 2007. Then, as now, many were from Minneapolis, Minnesota, and of Somali descent.

At the time of the Somali civil war, al-Shabab recruiters successfully leveraged the involvement of Ethiopian troops working in conjunction with the Somali government to create a narrative of "crusader" aggression. Jihadists began to seduce young men to the battlefield and indoctrinate them with radical Islamic ideas and jihad. By the fall of 2010, U.S. intelligence estimated that several American citizens had risen to senior leadership positions in the organization.²⁵⁶

During investigations and court proceedings, individuals in the Minnesota cluster stated that part of their inspiration to support ISIS was came from their belief that "Islam is at war" in reaction to the many injustices Muslims have faced globally. Due to their peer-to-peer relationships and the jihadist ideologies they researched online, members of the Minnesota cluster also felt it was their religious obligation to support the call to jihadi. The online propaganda ISIS, which is continuously released, instilled the message that it had a perfect Islamic society fulfilled as paradise. The recruiter would then have this perceived power, which would allow them to fight and protect fellow Muslims.

One influencer of individuals in the Minnesota cluster was Anwar Nassar Awlaki, an American-born Muslim of Yemeni descent who spoke flawless English and Arabic. He was both intelligent and educated. He studied abroad in Yemen as well as in the United States and was an admired imam preaching in many U.S. mosques. Through the years, his preaching became evermore radical and eventually became an extreme Islamist. To his

²⁵⁵ Berger, *Jihad Joe*, 104.

²⁵⁶ Berger, 170.

followers, Awlaki repeatedly preached that Muslims were under attack around the world and that jihad was both justified and necessary if the injustices inflicted on Muslims were to stop. Although he was killed in 2011, Awlaki was also an emerging player in the radicalization of Westerners, especially for many Somali Americans in Minnesota before and after 2014. Many of the codefendants and attempted travelers in this network testified in numerous court records, documents, and public hearings that they watched hours of Alwaki's lectures. Alwaki's strategies of recruiting and mobilizing followers online continued years after his death. The magazine he founded, *Inspire*, continues to motivate American Muslims to plan and plot against America in defense of the Muslim community.

2. Social Media Support Jihadist Mobilization and Recruitment

ISIS propaganda through social media has contributed to ISIS supporters in the United States becoming jihadists. As Sageman notes,

The Internet creates a seemingly concrete bond between the individual and a virtual Muslim community. This virtual community plays the same role that 'imagined communities' playing in the development of the feelings of nationalism, which made people love and die for their nations as well as hate and kill for them. Because of this virtual nature, the Internet community has no earthly counterpart and becomes idealized in the mind of surfers. This community is just, egalitarian, full of opportunity, unified in an Islam purged of national peculiarities and devoid of corruption, exploitation, and persecution.²⁵⁷

The Internet provides access to anyone with access through platforms of information through videos, images, audio recordings, chat rooms, blogs, and discussion boards, as well as live streams of people with information. Communication among Islamic chat rooms on social media site has become egalitarian, and users recognize no authority other than the tests of the Quran and Hadith. These tests use various theological arguments of Islam practices that specifically appeal to most Muslims, regardless of their theological educational background, to lure potential recruits.²⁵⁸ Virtually all information is "at one's fingertips," and one can absorb every bit of information as one chooses.

²⁵⁷ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 161.

²⁵⁸ Sageman. 161.

The online career of al-Shabaab member Mohamed Abdullahi Hassan (also known as Mujahid Miski)²⁵⁹ is another example of how the Internet serves as a conduit for jihadist organizations. Hassan campaigned with an intensive online network from Minnesota aimed at communicating with group members as potential recruits. Miski was American born in Minnesota and of Somalian descent. In 2013, he left the United States and fled to Somalia to support al-Shabaab; currently, his status and location is unknown. However, he is connected to individuals in the Minnesota cluster because of kinship and friendship ties.

This Minnesota cluster of Somali Americans shifted its support from al-Shabaab in Somalia to ISIS in Syria because ISIS began to target al-Shabaab's recruiting network and persuaded them to travel to Syria. By using the individuals that fled to Somali as recruiters to contact their friends and family in the United States, mainly Minnesota, to inspire them to flee to Syria. ISIS recruitment efforts in both Somali and in Minnesota has capitalized on the caliphate, the apocalypse and the support of the global Muslim community. Al-Shabab remains an affiliate of al-Qaeda, yet ISIS has repeatedly attempted to gain their loyalty. The State Department has declared, "ISIS-Somalia was formed in October 2015 after Abdiqadr Mumin—then a senior leader of al-Shabaab—and about twenty of his followers, pledged allegiance to ISIS."²⁶⁰ These individuals contacted others still in the United States via instant messages or on Facebook and apparently invited them to bask in the glory of jihad and enticed them to flee. During its height in 2015, ISIS produced over 200 products weekly²⁶¹ of jihad-inspired propaganda used to influence and target recruits. Most of the 24 individuals within the Minnesota cluster confirmed their support of ISIS was motivated and inspired by this propaganda. This online network is an example of the quagmire the world faces in modern times with Islamic radicals.

²⁵⁹ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *The Travelers*.

²⁶⁰ "State Department Terrorist Designations of ISIS Affiliates and Senior Leaders," U.S. Department of State, February 27, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/02/278883.htm>.

²⁶¹ Whiteside, *Lighting the Path*, 3.

3. Call of Duty to the Umma

In 2014, ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the caliphate and himself as the world Muslim leader. He required all Muslims to support him, ISIS, and to declare jihad on all who were against them. Al-Baghdadi instructed his listeners to flee to Syria or to execute attacks anywhere they could in support of ISIS. In his publicized message, he stated, “There is no excuse for any Muslim not to migrate to the Islamic State. Joining is a duty of every Muslim. We are calling on you to either join or carry weapons [to fight] wherever you are.”²⁶²

Jihad is based on a distorted interpretation of Islam that justifies the war to protect the global Muslim community, the umma.²⁶³ Minnesota has a diasporic community of Muslims, and it is sometimes referred to as “Little Mogadishu,” the Somali capital of America Muslims. Berger explains Islamic literature notably from the Muslim World League states, “Islam is under attack from enemies everywhere. Islam is misunderstood because of vicious lies by its enemies. Muslims are persecuted and discriminated against on the global stage and in individual countries.”²⁶⁴ For example, Abu Musab al Suri, a jihadist theorist, claims the Internet has greatly expanded potential audiences and that the purpose of jihad is to call Muslims to protect the *umma*, the worldwide Muslim community.²⁶⁵

Both community and religious identity are essentials to Muslims. In the United States, Muslim-Americans embrace both aspects of their identity. The majority are proud to be American (92 percent) and Muslim (97 percent).²⁶⁶ Indeed, nearly nine in 10 (89 percent) attest to be honored to be *both* Muslim and American.²⁶⁷ However, regarding

²⁶² Ilana Freedman, *Jihad! Understand the Threat of the Islamic State to America* (Washington, DC: Center of Security Policy, 2016), 14.

²⁶³ Berger, *Jihad Joe*. 205.

²⁶⁴ Berger. 205.

²⁶⁵ Whiteside, *Lighting the Path*, 3.

²⁶⁶ “U.S. Muslims Concerned about Their Place in Society, but Continue to Believe in the American Dream,” Pew Research Center, July 26, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/findings-from-pew-research-centers-2017-survey-of-us-muslims/>.

²⁶⁷ Pew Research Center, “U.S. Muslims Concerned about Their Place.”

their ability to integrate into American culture, some declare they are satisfied, while many believe that although they have much in common with most American citizens, in most ways, they stand out in the United States.²⁶⁸ For instance, there is a distinctive appearance as most Muslim women wear a hijab. Additionally, 80 percent state their bond to the global Muslim community is strong.²⁶⁹

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis recommends the FBI consider strategies to expand its Counterterrorism Division and launch an information operations campaign for awareness and prevention of Islamic extremism. Congress, law enforcement, and private industry must enhance cooperation to discuss solutions to resolve the progressing threat and to ensure public safety against terrorists' threats with a plan that protects civil liberties and cybersecurity. The joint terrorism task forces (JTTFs) of the Counterterrorism Division of the FBI are multi-agency units, composed of investigators, linguists, intelligence analysts, and tactical personnel who investigate terrorist activity. There are currently 103 JTTFs and 4,400 agents located in cities across the country. Additional funds are necessary to expand the FBI's Counterterrorism Division to monitor communications of suspected terrorist supporters and provide additional resources to be shared among partnered agencies for intelligence professionals and law enforcement personnel to disrupt terrorist activity within the United States.²⁷⁰

It also recommends that the United States develop more effective and proactive solutions to counter the ISIS's messaging and block social and Internet access aimed at recruitment. How can the United States government protect itself, its people, and its community when this spread of theology has incubated in social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube like an infectious disease? Additional research is necessary to assess the extent of this phenomenon. Homegrown terrorists supporting an extreme Islamic ideology have become a viral outbreak confined to specific cities and

²⁶⁸ Pew Research Center.

²⁶⁹ Pew Research Center.

²⁷⁰ Steinbach, "ISIL Online."

states across the United States. The United States government must ensure that this threat is defeated before it evolves into an epidemic rapidly spreading across the country. Alternatively, the threat has advanced into becoming a global pandemic and poses a dangerous risk to national security and foreign policy. The U.S. government agencies and the Intelligence Community must communicate effectively with social media networks, such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and others, to strategize a practical solution to eradicate the threat of online ISIS radicalization and recruitment. Seamus Hughes suggests,

To grapple with this tension, the United States should work with companies to develop trusted flagging mechanisms, algorithms, and perhaps “robust hashing” techniques developed by such computer scientists as Dartmouth College professor Hany Farid that can identify which accounts present national security threats.²⁷¹

The United States needs to respond to this threat as it would to an emergency.

A third recommendation is that we increase popular awareness and community support throughout the United States to combat the threat radicalization and recruitment poses by as many methods as possible, including the launch of a full-blown information operations campaign focused on promoting and disseminating knowledge, information, and guidance to the masses. The campaign should use the Internet, social media sites, commercials, public events, newsletters, magazines, manuals, and other printed materials as public awareness platforms regarding the homegrown terrorists’ threat imposed by ISIS. A challenge, of course, will be to do this without ramping up anti-Muslim rhetoric, which as we have already seen, appears to increase support for ISIS.

To summarize, this thesis recommends that

- The federal government needs to create deradicalization intervention strategies to prevent citizens fleeing abroad to fight with a terrorist organization and for a citizen to plot attacks in the United States.
- The U.S. government needs to collaborate with social media companies to facilitate the removal of Islamic extremism content. The development of

²⁷¹ Vidino and Hughes, *ISIS in America*.

algorithm software to detect violent content should be further researched and developed.

- All government and law enforcement agencies should incorporate violent Islamist extremism training with emphasis on triggers of radicalization. Agencies need additional training on deradicalization and disengagement.
- The government, DHS, and other agencies should design national outreach campaign to foster general awareness and build communities to prevent radicalization, to enhance the understanding of extremism, and to build awareness on how to respond and prevent radicalization on the community level;

C. CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, despite all our progress against ISIL on the battlefield and in the financial realm, our efforts have not reduced the group's terrorism capability and global reach.

—John Brennan, CIA Director ²⁷²

Understanding what drives homegrown Islamic extremism is only the first step in combatting it; however, it is an essential first step. The rate of U.S. homegrown Islamic extremists has increased from 2014 to 2017 with this wave of ISIS. Terrorism will likely always continue, whether ISIS or another group, and this makes efforts to promote national resilience vital. Without a doubt, countering this radical ideology will be a long-term challenge. While this study's findings provide an understanding of the homegrown jihad terrorists in the United States, much additional research is needed to diagnose this issue. Other research could provide a further explanation of these occurrences and could potentially be used to deter future recruitment efforts. Intervention programs could significantly contribute to ongoing prevention efforts.²⁷³

²⁷² Homeland Security Committee, *Terror Gone Viral*.

²⁷³ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *The Travelers*, 86.

In his thesis, Pierson notes a statement, credited to Yemeni journalist Abdulelah Haider Shaye, encapsulating the core of Islamist ideas: “that ISIS was drafted by Sayyid Qutb, taught by Abdullah Azzam, globalized by Osama bin Laden, transferred to reality by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and implemented by al-Baghdadi, Abu Omar, and Abu Bakr.”²⁷⁴ ISIS’s rise and global growth, with the purest followers of Islam by demonstrating their unmatched devotion to Allah and their strict implementation of sharia law, has shown the world their ruthless expression of Islam.²⁷⁵ ISIS’s strategy is to instill in its followers the desire to die for the caliphate and usher in a world without infidels—without those who do not ardently support them.

The implications for policymakers is to consider multifaceted strategies for defeating an extreme ideology. For nearly 17 years, the United States has discussed and debated this large problem set. If radicalization within Muslim countries and of American-Muslims and ISIS ideology and narratives continues, new strategies are imperative to mitigate this threat. As reflected by several George Washington University studies on ISIS from 2015 to 2018, the risk of violent extremism has expanded significantly in the United States. Since May of 2018, 161 U.S. citizens have committed crimes in support of ISIS.²⁷⁶ However, this data cannot show the level of integration of each supporter nor how these supporters were or were not integrated either within the Muslim community or within a society that believes in extreme versions of Islam. If policymakers can understand the reasons why American citizens who are Muslim or non-Muslim are supporting these groups, then they can formulate and consider solutions.²⁷⁷ In the past 16 years, jihadism has advanced terrorism through unpredictable methods and techniques. ISIS Salafi ideological interpretation that the Islamic tradition is legitimately served by strict Islamic order that provides a simple life with a structured system of what is right and wrong,

²⁷⁴ Pierson, “Western Radicalization.”

²⁷⁵ Freedman, *Jihad!*

²⁷⁶ George Washington University, “The Cases Program on Extremism.”

²⁷⁷ Walter, “The Extremist’s Advantage.”

permissible and forbidden, has attracted militants globally.²⁷⁸ The United States has spent trillions of dollars to counter terrorism through diplomacy, homeland security, and military campaigns, and with this capabilities and initiatives, the threat stands.²⁷⁹

ISIS is unquestionably a threat. Despite the loss of most of ISIS's physical territory, its digital footprint still survives. Its messaging is still active and its seduction to lure U.S. citizens to mobilize, and revolt is present in the living rooms of Americans who are sympathizers and support it. However, it is incumbent on us to realize that even if ISIS were to become obsolete tomorrow, there remain hundreds of other extremist groups in line to wage jihad with the same intent and willing to use all forces necessary to establish a transnational caliphate.

This thesis has reviewed the threat of radicalization and terrorism as a pressing issue that faces our world today and the dangers of homegrown terrorists. This thesis has explained several examples of the vulnerability to national security that violent extremist groups pose and the harm they inflict on society primarily through the Internet. Today's extremists are dialed into social media, which enables a virtual battlefield of recruitment and radicalization.

The data gathered illuminates the complexity of the threat that homegrown terrorists pose. Additionally, the analysis in this thesis established that Islamist extremists and the theology that drives them are no longer only found abroad. The 2018 Program of Extremism tracker confirms the threat has expanded significantly into the United States through its finding that 161 U.S. citizens since 2015 have committed crimes in support of ISIS.²⁸⁰ This research postulated that focus on counter-radicalization efforts both online and through increased cooperation between local communities and federal authorities could decrease the potential for recruitment.

²⁷⁸ Mohammed M. Hafez, "Fratricidal Jihadists: Why Islamists Keep Losing Their Civil War," *Middle East Policy* XXV, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 86–99.

²⁷⁹ Wright, *The Jihadi Threat*.

²⁸⁰ George Washington University, "The Cases Program on Extremism."

The thesis concludes that if the U.S. government decreases CVE funding, it will damage the national security of the United States. Domestic CVE efforts focused on deradicalization and disengagement have the best chance of effectiveness. This thesis also includes an examination of the radicalization trajectories and consideration to design policy solutions to protect the United States in the future to counter violent extremists.

In the research of Seamus Hughes at the George Washington's Program on Extremism on the surge of Americans who have supported ISIS and jihadism has revealed there is no clear profile encompassing a potential radicalization candidate. Research has determined that there is not a set of predictable patterns of radicalization of an individual. Each radicalized individual was unique in age, financial status, education level, knowledge of Islam, and practice in faith.²⁸¹ However, one of the prominent findings of Hughes is that family members can detect early suspicions. Hughes labels it "simply parents intuition."²⁸² His research recognized how parents, extended family members, and even communities leaders would intervene and do all they could to prevent their loved one from supporting ISIS. However, currently, the United States does not have deradicalization or disengagement programs through which family members or community leaders can get assistance.

Overall, in exploring why Americans have supported ISIS, this thesis has discussed how the caliphate can be viewed as something historic and part of the call of duty to the Muslim people. American jihadis are lured to embrace this terrorist groups propaganda because of the successful recruiting skills ISIS has embodied. The research concluded indicates that supporters are looking for an adventure or military training and others for life purpose.

Initially, I intended to collect data to construct an SNA report that included known ties representing a network of U.S. citizens who have either been arrested or are confirmed

²⁸¹ *Low Cost, High Impact: Combatting the Financing of Lone-Wolf and Small-Scale Terrorist Attacks before the U.S. House of Representatives Financial Services* (2017) (testimony of Seamus Hughes, Deputy Director, Program on Extremism, George Washington University), <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/HughesLowCostHighImpact.pdf>.

²⁸² *Low Cost, High Impact*.



foreign fighters. However, the level of research required to build an entire network of homegrown terrorists in the United States was beyond the scope of this project. Overall, this project was scaled back to identify a cluster of U.S. citizens who have been arrested and convicted for being ISIS supporters and how SNA could assist law enforcement agencies and the military by using potential targeting and course of action strategies. The Minnesota jihadi cluster stands out as a location with a disproportionately high percentage of extremism and radicalization. Future research should examine this high degree of radicalization in this area of the United States and construct a more comprehensive SNA report that would include all those arrested for ISIS-related crimes and those who have become foreign fighters.

Furthermore, additional research could focus on practical recruitment strategies of violent extremist groups to determine what efforts we should make toward a counter-messaging campaign. If counterterrorism agencies utilize high-quality design and production messages to target populations with the potential to radicalize, they can prevent individuals from becoming violent. Additionally, I recommend the design of a counter media campaign to saturate the community with awareness. Further research could identify and coalesce the lessons learned within the past decades and discover what countermeasures are necessary to produce a comprehensive strategy. Lastly, even though the physical battlespace of ISIS in Syria and Iraq is dismantled and the majority of its media campaign has dissolved, we still need to discover how this will change the call to duty in the future because the ISIS threat itself has not dissolved.

APPENDIX. MINNESOTA ISIS CLUSTER

I researched the names and information identified in this Appendix and the Minnesota cluster through various open source data. The majority of the data has come from the following reports: the New America International Security program Terrorism in America After 9/11, the George Washington University Program on Extremism publications *ISIS in America*, *Fear Thy Neighbor: Radicalization and Jihadist Attacks in the West*, and *The Travelers: American Jihadists in Syria and Iraq* as well as the George Washington Program Extremism Tracker and Counter Extremism Project's *Guide to Online Propagandists*.²⁸³

Table 8. Six Codefendants of Minnesota Cluster²⁸⁴

 285	<p>Abdirahman Yasin Daud (U.S. Citizen, Somali origin)²⁸⁶ Attended South High School Graduated from Heritage Academy in Minneapolis. Attended Minneapolis Community and Technical College Member of the Al-Farooq mosque in Bloomington +Friendships: Abdullahi Yusuf, Abdi Nur, Abdirizak Warsame</p>
 287	<p>Adnan Farah (U.S. Citizen, Somali origin)²⁸⁸ Attended South High School Member of the Al-Farooq mosque in Bloomington Brother: Mohamed Farah +Friendships: Abdullahi Yusuf, Abdi Nur, Abdirizak Warsame</p>

²⁸³ Vidino and Hughes, *ISIS in America*; Counter Extremism Project, *Guide to Online Propagandists*; Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *the Travelers*; Lorenzo Vidino, Francesco Marone, and Eva Entenmann, *Fear Thy Neighbor: Radicalization and Jihadist Attacks in the West* (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2017), <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/FearThyNeighbor-RadicalizationandJihadistAttacksintheWest.pdf>.





²⁸⁴ Counter Extremism Project, *Guide to Online Propagandists*; Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *the Travelers*, Hughes and Vidino, "ISIS in America."

²⁸⁵ Associated Press, "Three Guilty of Conspiracy to Commit Murder Abroad in IS Case," *The Denver Post*, June 4, 2016, <https://www.denverpost.com/2016/06/04/jury-reaches-verdict-in-minnesota-islamic-state-trial/>.

²⁸⁶ Associated Press, "Three Guilty of Conspiracy."

²⁸⁷ Associated Press.

²⁸⁸ Laura Yuen, "Third ISIS Sentence of the Day: 10 Years," *MPR News*, November 15, 2016, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2016/11/15/day-2-of-isis-trial>.

 289	<p>Guled Omar (U.S. Citizen, Somali origin)²⁹⁰ Attended high school in Minneapolis Member of the Al-Farooq mosque in Bloomington +Friendships w/ Yusuf Jama, Hamza Ahmed, Abdullahi Yusuf, Abdi Nur, Abdirizak Warsame</p>
 291	<p>Hanad Mustafe Musse (U.S. Citizen, Somali origin)²⁹² Student at Minneapolis Community and Technical College Member of the Al-Farooq mosque in Bloomington +Friendships: Abdullahi Yusuf, Abdi Nur, Abdirizak Warsame</p>
 293	<p>Mohamed Abdihamid Farah (U.S. Citizen, Somali origin)²⁹⁴ Graduated 2012 from Heritage Academy of Science and Technology Member of the Al-Farooq mosque in Bloomington Brother: Adnan Farah +Friendships: Abdullahi Yusuf, Abdi Nur, Abdirizak Warsame</p>
 295	<p>Zacharia Yusuf Abdurahman (U.S. Citizen, Somali origin)²⁹⁶ 2013 graduate of Heritage Academy of Science and Technology, Attended Minneapolis Community and Technical College Member of the Al-Farooq mosque in Bloomington +Friendships: Abdullahi Yusuf, Abdi Nur, Abdirizak Warsame</p>

²⁸⁹ Counter Extremism Project, *Guide to Online Propagandists*.

²⁹⁰ Associated Press, "Three Guilty of Conspiracy."

²⁹¹ Yuen, "Third ISIS Sentence of the Day."

²⁹² Yuen.

²⁹³ Associated Press, "Three Guilty of Conspiracy."

²⁹⁴ Associated Press.

²⁹⁵ Amy Forliti, "Minnesota Man Is 3rd to Plead Guilty to Conspiring to Join ISIS," *CTV News*, September 17, 2015, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/world/minnesota-man-is-3rd-to-plead-guilty-to-conspiring-to-join-isis-1.2569112>.

²⁹⁶ Forliti, "Minnesota Man Is 3rd."

Table 9. Attempt Travelers

 <p>297</p>	<p>Abdirizak Warsame (U.S. Citizen, Somali origin)²⁹⁸ Attended Heritage Academy of Science and Technology Attended Normandale Community College Member of Al-Farooq mosque in Bloomington Friendships: Zacharia Abdurahman, Guled Ali Omar, Abdirahman Yasin Daud, Mohamed Abdihamid Farah, Hanad Mustafe Musse, Adnan Farah, Hanad Mohallim, Hamza Ahmed, Abdi Nur, Yusuf Jama</p>
 <p>299</p>	<p>Abdullahi Yusuf (U.S. Citizen, Somali origin)³⁰⁰ Attended Burnsville High School Graduate from Heritage High School Member of Al-Farooq mosque in Bloomington Sentenced: Friendships: Zacharia Abdurahman, Guled Ali Omar, Abdirahman Yasin Daud, Mohamed Abdihamid Farah, Hanad Mustafe Musse, Adnan Farah, Hanad Mohallim, Hamza Ahmed, Abdi Nur,</p>
 <p>301</p>	<p>Ahmend Omar³⁰² Friendships: Abdirahman Daud, Adnan Farah, Amir Meshal, Hanad Musse, Mohammed Farah, Zacharia Abdurahman, Mohammed Roble, Guled Omar, Mohammad Omar</p>
 <p>303</p>	<p>Hamza Ahmed (U.S. Citizen, Somali origin)³⁰⁴ Attended Burnsville High School Friendships: Zacharia Abdurahman, Guled Ali Omar, Abdirahman Yasin Daud, Mohamed Abdihamid Farah, Hanad Mustafe Musse, Adnan Farah, Hanad Mohallim, Abdi Nur, Abdullahi Yusuf.</p>

²⁹⁷ Counter Extremism Project, *Guide to Online Propagandists*.

²⁹⁸ Counter Extremism Project, *Guide to Online Propagandists*; Vidino and Hughes, *ISIS in America*.

²⁹⁹ Laura Yuen, "Amid ISIS Terror Concerns, a Minnesota Man Is Scrutinized but Not Charged," *MPR News*, September 21, 2015, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2015/09/19/amir-meshal>.

³⁰⁰ Yuen, "Third ISIS Sentence of the Day."

³⁰¹ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *The Travelers*.

³⁰² Counter Extremism Project, *Guide to Online Propagandists*.

³⁰³ Laura Yuen, "Called to Fight: Minnesota's ISIS Recruits," *MPR News*, March 9, 2016, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2015/03/25/minnesota-isis>.

³⁰⁴ Yuen, "Called to Fight: Minnesota's ISIS Recruits."

Table 10. Confirmed Travelers to Syria

 <p>305</p>	<p>Amir Meshal³⁰⁶ Abdi Nur, Abdirahman Daud, Abullahi Yusof, Adnan Farah, Amir Meshal, Guled Omar, Hanad Musse, Mohammed Farah, Zacharia Abdurahman</p>
 <p>307</p>	<p>Abdi Nur (U.S. Citizen, Somali origin)—At-large³⁰⁸ Graduated Southwest High School Attended Normandale Community College Member of Al-Farooq mosque in Bloomington Friendships: Zacharia Abdurahman, Guled Ali Omar, Abdirahman Yasin Daud, Mohamed Abdihamid Farah, Hanad Mustafe Musse, Adnan Farah, Hanad Mohallim, Hamza Ahmed, Yusuf Jama, Abdirizak Warsame, Hesi Karie, Hamse Karie, Douglas McCain, Abdifatah Ahmed,</p>
 <p>309</p>	<p>Abdifatah Ahmed (U.S. Citizen, Somali origin)—Dead³¹⁰ Friendships: Abdi Nur, Hanad Mohallim, Douglas McAuthur McCain, Hesi Karie, Hamse Karie</p>
 <p>311</p>	<p>Douglas McAuthur McCain (U.S. Citizen, Unknown origin) Dead³¹² Attended high schools in the Robbinsdale Friendships: Abdi Nur, Abdifatah Ahmed, Hanad Mohallim</p>
	<p>Hamse Karie³¹³ Friendships: Abdi Nur, Abdifatah Ahmed, Abdirizak Warsame, Douglas McAuthur, Guled Omar, Hesi Karie, Hanad Abdullahi Mohallim</p>

³⁰⁵ Yuen, “Amid ISIS Terror Concerns.”

³⁰⁶ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *the Travelers*.

³⁰⁷ George Washington University, “The Cases Program on Extremism.”

³⁰⁸ Hughes and Vidino, “ISIS in America.”







³⁰⁹ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *The Travelers*.

³¹⁰ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford.

³¹¹ Counter Extremism Project, *Guide to Online Propagandists*.

³¹² Counter Extremism Project.

³¹³ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *The Travelers*.

 314	<p>Hanad Abdullahi Mohallim (U.S. Citizen, Somali origin)—Dead³¹⁵</p> <p>Burnsville High School</p> <p>Friendships: Abdi Nur, Abdifatah Ahmed, Douglas McCain, Zacharia Abdurahman, Guled Ali Omar, Abdirahman Yasin Daud, Mohamed Abdihamid Farah, Hanad Mustafe Musse, Adnan Farah, Abdirizak Warsame, Hersi Karie, Hamse Karie</p>
	<p>Hersi Karie³¹⁶</p> <p>Friendships: Abdi Nur, Abdifatah Ahmed, Guled Omar, Hamse Karie, Hanad Abdullahi Mohallim</p>
	<p>Ifrah Nur³¹⁷</p> <p>Friendships: Abdirahman Daud, Abullahi Yusof, Adnan Farah, Amir Meshal, Guled Omar, Hanad Musse, Mohammed Farah, Nur Sister BF, Zacharia Abdurahman, Mohammed Roble, Abdi Nur, Omar Jamal</p>
	<p>Mohammad Omar³¹⁸</p> <p>Friendships: Abdi Nur, Abdirahman Daud, Adnan Farah, Amir Meshal, Hanad.Musse</p> <p>Mohammed Farah, Zacharia Abdurahman, Ahmend Omar, Guled Omar</p>
 319	<p>Mohammed Roble³²⁰</p> <p>Friendships: Abdirahman Daud, Abullahi Yusof, Adnan Farah, Guled Omar, Nur Sister BF, Mohammed Farah, Abdi Nur, Ahmend Omar, Ifrah Nur</p>
 321	<p>Yusra Ismail (U.S. Citizen—Unknown origin)—At-large³²²</p> <p>Attended Lighthouse Academy of Nations</p> <p>Al-Farooq mosque in Bloomington</p> <p>Friendships: Abdirizak Warsame, Guled Ali Omar, Abdi Nur</p>

³¹⁴ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford.

³¹⁵ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford.

³¹⁶ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford.

³¹⁷ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford.

³¹⁸ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford.

³¹⁹ Erik Ortiz, “Minneapolis Bridge Collapse Survivor Mohamed Roble Charged with Joining ISIS,” *NBC News*, August 25, 2106, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/minneapolis-bridge-collapse-survivor-mohamed-roble-charged-joining-isis-n637636>.

³²⁰ Ortiz, “Minneapolis Bridge Collapse Survivor.”

³²¹ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford, *The Travelers*.

³²² Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford.




 323	Yusuf Jama (U.S. Citizen—Unknown origin)—Believed dead ³²⁴ Friendships: Guled Omar, Abdirizak Warsame, Hamza Ahmed,
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Table 11. ISIS Supporters

 325	Muhammed Abdullahi Hassan, or “Mujahid Miski” ³²⁶ Friendships: Abdi Nur, Abullahi Yusof, Amir Meshal
	Omar Jamal ³²⁷ Friendships: Abullahi.Yusof, Nur.Sister BF, Abdi Nur, Ifrah Nur

³²³ Counter Extremism Project, *Guide to Online Propagandists*.

³²⁴ Counter Extremism Project.

³²⁵ Vidino and Hughes, *ISIS in America*.

³²⁶ Counter Extremism Project; Vidino and Hughes, *ISIS in America*.

³²⁷ Counter Extremism Project, *Guide to Online Propagandists*.

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