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# JIHADIST TERRORISM 16 YEARS AFTER 9/11

A Threat Assessment

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# INTRODUCTION

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To assess the scope of the jihadist terrorism threat, this paper is organized into nine sections:

- First, key findings
- Second, a taxonomy of ISIS terrorism
- Third, an assessment of the war on ISIS and other extremist groups
- Fourth, the state of the current jihadist terrorist threat to the United States
- Fifth, an analysis of ISIS' American recruits
- Sixth, an assessment of the ISIS threat to Europe
- Seventh, an examination of the big drivers of jihadist terrorism
- Eighth, a discussion of future trends in terrorism
- And, finally, what can be done to reduce the threat from jihadist terrorists.

# KEY FINDINGS

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- Al-Qaeda and its breakaway faction, ISIS, have failed to direct a deadly attack inside the United States since 9/11. Indeed, no foreign terrorist organization has carried out a successful attack in the United States since 9/11, and none of the perpetrators of the 11 lethal jihadist attacks in the U.S. since 9/11 received training from a foreign terrorist group.
- Every lethal jihadist terrorist in the United States since 9/11 was either a U.S. citizen or permanent resident of the United States at the time of the attack. Of the 13 deadly attackers, eight – more than half – were born in the United States. None of the terrorists came from the six Muslim-majority countries covered by the temporary travel ban instituted by the Trump administration.
- The threat to the United States does not come from foreign terrorists originating in the countries targeted by the travel ban but is largely homegrown. Eighty-five percent of the 415 individuals tracked by New America and accused of jihadist terrorism-related crimes in the United States since 9/11 were either U.S. citizens or U.S. legal residents; 207 – just under half – were born American citizens.<sup>1</sup> Just under a third were converts.
- They are for the most part ordinary Americans. Among the 415 individuals accused of various types of jihadist terrorism crimes, at the time of the charge or incident their average age was 29, more than a third were married, and a third had children.<sup>a</sup> Fewer than one in four have a known criminal record; in comparison, a third of American adults have a criminal record.<sup>2</sup> About 13 percent either were diagnosed with a mental health issue or were credibly reported to be suffering from a mental health issue. (According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, about 18 percent of Americans experience a diagnosable mental health condition in a given year.)<sup>3</sup>
- Since 2014, the year ISIS burst onto the global scene, there have been six lethal jihadist attacks in the United States, killing 74 people, accounting for more than three-quarters of all deaths caused by jihadists in the United States since the 9/11 attacks. None of the deadly

<sup>a</sup> Broken down further, of the 415 individuals, 176 are unmarried, 152 are married, for 58 their marital status is unknown, 22 are divorced, five have split with their partner, and two are widows. One hundred and thirty of the 415 individuals are known to have children.

jihadist attacks in the United States since 2014 had a known operational connection to ISIS or its networks.

- The most likely threat to the United States comes from terrorists inspired by ISIS or with some contact with ISIS' virtual recruitment networks, as opposed to terrorist attacks of the sort seen in Paris in 2015 and Brussels in 2016, in which the terrorists were trained by ISIS Core based in Syria.
- Today's extremists in the United States radicalize online, and the internet knows no visa requirements. Since the 9/11 attacks, more than four in 10 jihadists tracked by New America in the United States were very active online; they either maintained social media accounts where they posted jihadist material or interacted with extremists via encrypted communications. In recent years, such activity has been almost universal among American jihadists. From 2013 to 2014, the total percent of these extremists who radicalized online jumped from 47 percent to 76 percent. In 2015, this figure rose to 90 percent. While falling to 43 percent in 2016, it rose again to 83 percent of cases as of September 2017.
- The travel ban in its current form would not have prevented a single death from jihadist terrorists since 9/11. Nor would it have prevented the 9/11 attacks, which were perpetrated by 15 Saudis, two Emiratis, an Egyptian and a Lebanese citizen — four countries that are not on the travel ban list.
- No lethal act of jihadist terrorism since 9/11 has been carried out by a Syrian refugee. In fact, of the 12 individuals who were refugees at the time they were charged and are among the 415 militants involved in jihadist terrorism in the United States since 9/11, none are from Syria.
- The terrorist threat in the United States does not emanate only from individuals motivated

by jihadist ideology. The United States faces a broader challenge that includes individuals who plan and commit political violence motivated by a range of ideologies — such as far-right, neo-Nazi, black-nationalist and far-left — as well as those with idiosyncratic motivations.

- Since 9/11, individuals motivated by far-right ideology have killed 68 people in the United States, New America has found, while individuals motivated by black-nationalist ideology have killed eight people in the United States. Jihadist terrorists have killed 95 people in the United States since 9/11.
- In 2016, the National Counterterrorism Center briefed the White House that ISIS was fully operational in 18 countries and had aspirational branches taking root in six more.<sup>4</sup> In addition to its branches, ISIS or its followers have conducted attacks in countries where it does not have affiliates, including the United States, Belgium, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom.
- ISIS is on the run in Iraq and Syria. This is the result of ISIS' incoherent strategy. When the group stuck to its goal of conquering territory in Iraq and Syria in order to create a "caliphate" where it ruled as a self-styled "Islamic State," it seized territory the size of the United Kingdom and lorded over a population the size of Switzerland. But when it began publicly murdering American journalists and aid workers in the summer of 2014, the United States quickly assembled a global coalition that has conducted thousands of airstrikes against ISIS and mounted significant ground operations against the group.
- By August 2017, ISIS had ceded operational control in 78 percent of its territory in Iraq and 58 percent of what it controlled in Syria, and the coalition had killed between 60,000 and 70,000 ISIS fighters.<sup>5</sup>

- However, ISIS is not itself the problem — though it certainly amplifies existing ones — but rather the symptom of nine major problems and trends that are driving jihadist terrorism around the globe and will continue to do so even when ISIS is largely defeated.<sup>6</sup>
- Those nine problems and trends: the regional civil war in the Middle East between Sunni and Shia; the collapse of Arab governance around the region; the collapse of economies in war-torn Muslim states; the population bulge in the Middle East and North Africa; the tidal wave of Muslim immigration into Europe; the marginalization of Muslims in Europe; the rise of European ultranationalist parties; the spread of militant Salafism; and social media’s amplification of anger caused by all of these trends. These drivers of jihadism strongly suggest that a son of ISIS will form in coming years.
- Even as ISIS suffers repeated setbacks, al-Qaeda has shown surprising resiliency in the face of the counterterrorism campaigns against it and the challenge from within the jihadist movement that was posed by the rise of ISIS.
- One hundred and twenty-nine Americans are credibly reported to have joined, attempted to join or supported others’ efforts to join ISIS or other jihadist groups in Syria. They come from 25 states: Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin.
- There is no single ethnic profile for these militants. They are white, African-American, Somali-American, Vietnamese-American, Bosnian-American, and Arab-American, among other ethnicities and nationalities.
- A key characteristic that ties together American militants drawn to the Syrian conflict is that they are active in online jihadist circles. Of the 129 individuals, 101 showed a pattern of often downloading and sharing jihadist propaganda online and, in a smaller number of cases, engaging in online conversations with militants abroad. Militants in the United States today become radicalized after reading and interacting with propaganda online, and generally have little or no physical interaction with other extremists. In the useful formulation of Israeli counterterrorism expert Gabriel Weimann, the lone wolf is now part of a virtual pack.
- Social media has dramatically accelerated this trend. Of the 129 individual cases that New America examined, there were no clear cases of physical recruitment by a militant operative, radical cleric, or returning fighter from Syria. Instead, people self-recruited online or were sometimes in touch via Twitter or other encrypted-messaging platforms with members of ISIS they had never met in person.
- Lost in the intense coverage of the ISIS-inspired threat in the United States is the continuing influence of the American-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, whose sermons and writings on the importance of jihad have appeared in 116 jihadist terrorism cases since 9/11, according to New America’s research. Al-Awlaki was killed in a drone strike in Yemen in 2011, but killing the man turned out to be easier than killing his ideas; since his death, al-Awlaki’s writings have turned up in 72 terrorism cases in the United States.
- The threat posed by American “foreign fighters” returning to the United States is limited. Not only is the number of American foreign fighters low compared to those of European countries, but also, to date, none of the seven American fighters who fought for ISIS or other extremist groups in Iraq and Syria and then returned have

committed an act of terrorism after returning.

- Of the 13 jihadist terrorists who have conducted the 11 lethal attacks in the United States since 9/11, five — more than a third — had histories of committing domestic violence or sexual crimes.
- This is not a phenomenon restricted to jihadist terrorists. Of the 59 perpetrators of lethal political violence in the States since 9/11 who were motivated by jihadist, far-right or black-nationalist ideology, nearly a quarter had a history of domestic violence or sexual crime.
- While the United States has seen no lethal attacks directed by foreign terrorist organizations since 9/11, there have been five ISIS-directed attacks in Europe since 2014 that killed 188 people, around two times the death toll of all deadly jihadist attacks in the United States since 9/11.
- Europe has also seen a variety of ISIS-inspired attacks. Twenty-nine ISIS-inspired attacks have killed 123 people in Europe since 2014, more than jihadist terrorists have killed in the United States since 9/11.
- Europe has experienced seven ISIS-“enabled” attacks since 2014, compared to only one ISIS-enabled plot in the United States. Twenty people died in ISIS-enabled attacks in Europe while no one has died in an ISIS-enabled attack in the United States.
- According to Europol, European states arrested 718 people for jihadist terrorism-related activity in 2016, an increase from 2015. That is considerably more jihadist terrorism-related arrests than law enforcement has made in the United States since 9/11.
- Key counterterrorism policy changes under President Trump include loosened rules of engagement in Yemen and Somalia, allowing for a ramp-up in targeted strikes and Special Operations forces activity.

- Eighty-one percent of hostages from the European Union held by jihadist terrorist groups since 9/11 were freed, compared to 25 percent from the United States and 33 percent from the United Kingdom. Continental European countries are far more likely to pay ransom than the United States and the United Kingdom.

### **Key Emerging Trends Among Jihadist Terrorists:**

- TATP-based bombs derived from widely available hydrogen peroxide are the ISIS bombs of choice.
- The number of vehicular attacks continues to rise; since 2014, there have been 15 vehicle-ramming attacks in the West, which have killed a total of 136 people.
- Terrorist attacks during Ramadan have increased over the last three years.
- Jihadist terrorists continue to target aviation and airports. The “insider” threat at airports is a major concern.
- Terrorist groups with armed drones pose a growing threat.
- Weapons of mass destruction are entirely absent in attacks by jihadist terrorists in the West. Of 74 attacks conducted by jihadists in the West since 2014, none involved chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear weapons (CBRN). Of the 415 people in the United States accused of jihadist terrorism-related crimes since 9/11, none acquired such weapons. (ISIS has frequently used crude chemical weapons such as chlorine on the battlefields of Syria.)
- However, since 9/11, crude CBRN weapons have been developed by individuals in the United States motivated by other ideologies. Thirteen individuals motivated by right-wing extremist

ideology, one individual motivated by left-wing extremist ideology and two with idiosyncratic beliefs used or acquired CBRN weapons or their precursors.

## What Can be Done?

There seems to be some conceptual confusion in the U.S. government about what “Countering Violent Extremism” programs are attempting to do: Is it counter-radicalization? Or is it counter-recruitment? Counter-radicalization — turning many millions of Muslims around the world away from radical ideas — seems both a nebulous mission and one that may not be achievable. A far more specific task is to stop the relatively small number of Muslims trying to join ISIS or sign up for its ideology from doing so. From an American national security perspective, that is, after all, the key goal.

- **Enlist rather than alienate the Muslim community.** The lesson of an FBI study of dozens of terrorism cases is that the most useful information comes from peers and family members. That’s why community outreach to Muslim communities to enlist their help in detecting those who may be becoming militant is the most fruitful approach to dealing with the scourge of terrorism.
- **Through electronic warfare or other means, take out ISIS’ propaganda production facilities in the Middle East and elsewhere.**
- **Establish a safe zone in northern Syria.**
- **Build a database of all the “foreign fighters” who have gone to Syria to fight for ISIS and the al-Qaeda affiliate there.**
- **Continue to partner with social media companies such as Twitter to enforce their own terms of use to take down any material that encourages violence, whether from ISIS or from neo-Nazis or other extremist groups.**
- **Relentlessly hammer home the message that while ISIS positions itself as the defender of Muslims, its victims are overwhelmingly fellow Muslims.**
- **No-Fly, No-Buy. Prevent suspected terrorists from buying military-style assault rifles.** Omar Mateen, Nidal Hasan and Carlos Bledsoe — three of the most prominent domestic terrorists since 9/11 — were all FBI subjects of interest, yet all legally purchased semiautomatic weapons shortly before their attacks. Congress should pass a law preventing this from happening in the future.
- **Stay in Afghanistan.** It is in American and Afghan interests for the United States to stay in Afghanistan so it doesn’t turn into a version of Iraq circa 2014, with the Taliban controlling much of the country while also hosting a strong presence of ISIS and al-Qaeda, as well as every other jihadist group of note.
- **Fund “micro-targeting” counter-messages for those looking at ISIS propaganda.**
- **Increase funding and research for “photo DNA” technologies of the kind that have largely banished child pornography images from social media platforms.**
- **Pass a new Authorization for Use of Military Force [AUMF].** Current U.S. military operations in seven Muslim countries are authorized by the AUMF that was passed just days after 9/11. Sixteen years later, the American public deserves a real debate and vote in Congress about the scope and length of U.S. operations against ISIS, al-Qaeda, and like-minded groups.
- **Do not designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization, as advocated by some in the Trump administration.** This is a bad idea that will backfire, as it would effectively criminalize and label as terrorists tens of millions of Muslims around the world.

# A TAXONOMY OF ISIS TERRORISM

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Since it seized Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, in 2014, ISIS as well as groups and individuals linked to it have conducted attacks across the globe. In 2016, the National Counterterrorism Center briefed the White House that ISIS was fully operational in 18 countries and had aspirational branches taking root in six more.<sup>7</sup> In addition to its branches, ISIS or its followers have conducted attacks in countries where it does not have affiliates, including the United States, France, and the United Kingdom.

Yet not all ISIS-linked attacks are equal. There are five types of terrorist attacks that can in some way be considered an ISIS attack outside of Iraq and Syria:

1. An attack directed by ISIS Core, which is based in Iraq and Syria.
2. An attack carried out by an affiliate or "province" of ISIS with a tight connection to ISIS Core.
3. An attack carried out by an ISIS affiliate with little or no connection to ISIS Core.
4. An attack carried out by individuals "enabled" by ISIS Core or an affiliate — generally via online communication.

5. An attack carried out by individuals inspired by ISIS but with no connection to ISIS or its affiliates.

The five categories of attacks are fleshed out in more detail below.

## 1. Attacks Directed by ISIS Core

On Friday, Nov. 13, 2015, militants trained and directed by ISIS killed 130 people at multiple locations in Paris, including a concert hall, a soccer stadium, and a popular restaurant, the kinds of venues that ordinary Parisians flock to on a Friday night. At or near these venues, the attackers deployed a mix of terrorist tactics, including suicide attacks, an assault with more than one gunman willing to fight to the death, hostage-taking, and bombings.

French President Francois Hollande blamed ISIS for the attack, and the terror group quickly claimed responsibility. In January 2016, ISIS also released a video showing the attackers in Syria — six of whom were French or Belgian citizens — which definitively established that the terrorists who carried out the attacks in Paris were trained and directed by ISIS.<sup>8</sup>

In March 2016, members of the same ISIS cell attacked the Brussels airport and metro station, killing 32.<sup>9</sup> Once again, ISIS quickly claimed the attack.

On June 28, 2016, 45 people were killed in a shooting and suicide-bomb attack at Istanbul's Atatürk airport. ISIS fighters hailing from Russia, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan entered Turkey via Syria a month before the attack to plan and took direction from ISIS leadership.<sup>10</sup> Chechen-born Akhmed Chatayev, the commander of the Syria-based Yarmouk Battalion (an arm of ISIS made up mostly of Chechens), is believed to be the attack's planner.<sup>11</sup> On Jan. 1, 2017, ISIS also conducted an attack on a nightclub in Istanbul, killing 39 people. The attack was carried out by a lone shooter, and there is no evidence he traveled to Syria, yet the shooter was aided by a ISIS support network and was directed to conduct the attack by ISIS Core leadership.<sup>12</sup>

## **2. Attacks Directed by an ISIS Affiliate with a Tight Connection to ISIS Core**

On May 22, 2017, Salman Abedi, a 22-year-old British Muslim, killed 22 people in Manchester, England, when he detonated a bomb at an Ariana Grande concert.<sup>13</sup> Abedi met in Libya with members of ISIS' Battar Brigade, which played a key role in planning the 2015 Paris attacks.<sup>14</sup> Abedi also maintained contact with the Battar Brigade after he returned to England.<sup>15</sup>

ISIS affiliates, with tight connections to ISIS Core, have also conducted attacks outside the West. On Jan. 27, 2015, ISIS gunmen attacked the Corinthia Hotel in the Libyan capital, Tripoli, killing 10. Five of the victims were foreigners, including one American. ISIS Core celebrated the attack in some detail in Dabiq, its now-defunct online magazine, including photographs of the two ISIS gunmen.<sup>16</sup> A month later, ISIS Core released a video showing members of Egypt's Coptic Christian minority being beheaded on a Libyan beach by members of ISIS' Libyan affiliate.<sup>17</sup> The video showed the victims in

the orange jumpsuits that ISIS forces its victims to wear. Both the attack on the Corinthia Hotel and the beheading of the Christians suggested some measure of command and control by ISIS Core of its Libyan affiliate, according to a U.S. government official familiar with the intelligence on Libya. The official says that Libyan fighters have frequently traveled back and forth between Libya and Syria and Iraq.

Similarly, when ISIS militants took hostages at an upscale cafe in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in June 2016 and killed 20 mostly non-Muslim foreigners, they sent images of their victims lying in pools of blood to ISIS' de facto news agency, Amaq, which posted them almost in real time for the world to see. This established that the Bangladeshi affiliate of ISIS (known as Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh) had carried out the attacks and was also to some degree coordinating with ISIS Core.<sup>18</sup>

Another attack directed by an ISIS affiliate with close ties to ISIS Core is ISIS Sinai's bombing of a Russian airliner in October 2015, which killed all 224 people on board. ISIS claimed the attack and published images of the bomb in its Russian-language magazine.<sup>19</sup> Evidence of the degree of command-and-control and cooperation between ISIS Sinai and ISIS Core is scarce. However, reports suggest that ISIS Sinai leaders traveled to meet with ISIS Core and that ISIS leaders in Sirte, Libya, and Sinai are connected, too.<sup>20</sup> Another sign of links to ISIS Core is ISIS Sinai's use of sophisticated military tactics in its fight against the Egyptian military.

## **3. Attacks Directed by an ISIS Affiliate with Little or No Real Connection to ISIS Core**

A number of terrorist groups around the world have proclaimed themselves part of ISIS. In many of these cases, this seems to be more a matter of slapping on the ISIS patch than any kind of formal command-and-control by ISIS Core. For instance, in January 2015, ISIS-Khorasan, a splinter group of the Taliban, was declared an ISIS "wilayat," or regional province

of ISIS, though there seems to be little or no real direction of the group from ISIS Core.

The group has claimed a series of deadly attacks in Afghanistan, including an August 2017 suicide bombing at a Shia mosque in Herat that killed 29, and a suicide bombing and shootout at the Iraqi Embassy in the capital, Kabul, that killed two in July 2017.<sup>21</sup> A suicide bombing near the U.S. Embassy in Kabul killed nine people in May 2017 and an attack on a television station in Jalalabad later that month killed six people.<sup>22</sup> In July 2016, the group killed more than 80 people when it bombed Shia Hazaras attending a demonstration in Kabul.<sup>23</sup> At the time, it was the deadliest attack in Kabul ever — though in May 2017, that death toll was surpassed by a bombing that targeted Kabul's Diplomatic Quarter, killing at least 150 people; it remains unclaimed by any group.<sup>24</sup>

In 2015, Boko Haram in Nigeria pledged allegiance to ISIS, becoming Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Despite the pledge, ISWAP has far fewer links to ISIS Core than ISIS' Libya affiliate. ISWAP has been riven with internal disputes over leadership and strategy, including ISIS' decision to replace the group's leader, Abubakar Shekau; this split the group into two factions.<sup>25</sup>

Despite these challenges to ISIS' control of its West African province, Boko Haram, in becoming ISWAP, adopted key tactics of the group. This can be seen most clearly in the far more sophisticated use of video propaganda and social media that occurred once Boko Haram had pledged allegiance to ISIS in early 2015. In addition, while the extent of ties is disputed, there are reports of links between ISWAP and ISIS' Libyan affiliate. In April 2016, Brig. Gen. Donald C. Bolduc, who commands U.S. Special Operations in Africa, cited a weapons convoy dispatched from ISIS in Libya headed for the Lake Chad region where Boko Haram operates.<sup>26</sup> In May 2016, then-Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken mentioned reports that Boko Haram had sent fighters to support ISIS in Libya.<sup>27</sup> Like ISIS-Khorasan, Boko Haram has continued its terrorist campaign in 2017. In June 2017, the group launched

an assault on the Nigerian city of Maiduguri, its first major assault in more than 18 months.<sup>28</sup>

ISIS activity and influence in Southeast Asia, particularly the Philippines and Indonesia, present other cases of ISIS affiliates. Following the November 2014 announcement by ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi of the first set of formal ISIS provinces, videos containing pledges of allegiance to ISIS were released by a number of battalions belonging to the Philippine militant organization Abu Sayyaf Group.<sup>29</sup> In January 2016, ISIS for the first time accepted the pledges it was receiving from the Philippines and Southeast Asia, declaring Isnilon Hapilon its designated emir in the region. Yet, even in accepting the pledge, ISIS did not establish a Southeast Asian province of the Islamic State.<sup>30</sup>

In June 2017, the head of Indonesia's military, Gen. Gatot Nurmantyo, confirmed ISIS' presence in the country. He stated, "After observation, we see that in almost every province ... there are already IS cells, but they are sleeper cells."<sup>31</sup> In May 2017, a suicide bombing at a bus station in Jakarta, the country's capital and most populous city, killed three police officers. A connection to ISIS was established after authorities found an identification card at the site of the bombing for a man with known links to ISIS.<sup>32</sup>

#### **4. Attacks "Enabled" by ISIS**

ISIS and its affiliates have also reached out via online communication to encourage and enable attacks. These enabled attacks lack the kind of training that ISIS-directed attacks involve, but retain a level of direction by connecting individuals who are inspired by ISIS with figures in the ISIS hierarchy. In doing so, they create a blended form of attack, neither entirely inspired nor entirely directed.

The foiled attempt in July 2017 to detonate a bomb on a departing flight from Sydney, Australia, to Abu Dhabi, and to deploy a chemical dispersion device to trigger the release of hydrogen sulfide in Sydney,

was an ISIS-enabled plot. Australian Federal Police Deputy Commissioner for National Security Michael Phelan told reporters that a senior ISIS operative based in Syria shipped bomb-making materials, including weapons-grade explosives, via air cargo from Turkey to Australia.<sup>33</sup> Taking receipt of the materials was Khaled Khayat, who, along with his brother, Mahmoud, “harbored a deep desire to kill on behalf of Islamic State.”<sup>34</sup> Though unsuccessful, the plot to carry a bomb on the plane from Sydney and the subsequent plan to detonate the hydrogen-sulfide bomb in a crowded public area represented “one of the most sophisticated plots that has ever been attempted on Australian soil,” according to Phelan.<sup>35</sup>

On May 3, 2015, Elton Simpson and Nadir Soofi, two ISIS-inspired American militants, attacked the Prophet Mohammed cartoon contest in Garland, Texas. Before the attack, Simpson and Soofi were in contact with Junaid Hussain, a prominent ISIS virtual recruiter, as well as Mujahid Miski, an American who had left the United States to fight with Al-Shabaab in Somalia but later shifted his allegiances to ISIS.<sup>36</sup> Both terrorists were killed while they attempted to carry out the attack in Garland.

Europe has also seen enabled attacks. On July 18, 2016, Riaz Khan, an Afghan refugee, attacked train passengers in Wurzburg, Germany, with an ax. Khan had been in contact via messaging apps with ISIS figures, and ISIS quickly claimed the attack, releasing a video of Khan pledging his allegiance to the group.<sup>37</sup>

## 5. Attacks Inspired by ISIS

Finally, there are attacks by individuals and small groups of individuals who do not have any known link to ISIS, its affiliates or its online networks, yet who are inspired by ISIS and its cause to commit acts of violence. Such attacks range from those which ISIS claims as committed by “soldiers of the Caliphate,” to attacks that it only praises, to attacks that it ignores but whose perpetrators saw themselves as acting for the group.

Since 2014, there have been 11 violent attacks inspired by ISIS in the United States.<sup>b</sup>

The most lethal attack was in Orlando, Florida, in June 2016, when Omar Mateen killed 49 people at a nightclub catering to the gay community; it was the deadliest terrorist attack in the States since 9/11. Mateen pledged allegiance to ISIS and his attack was claimed by the group.

The most recent ISIS-inspired attack in the United States occurred on Jan. 31, 2017, when Joshua Cummings, a white convert to Islam, killed a security guard in Denver, Colorado, claiming to have done so on behalf of ISIS and pledging his allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.<sup>38</sup> ISIS, in contrast to its response to the shooting in Orlando, did not claim Cummings’ attack, illustrating how attacks inspired by ISIS can include both those ISIS claims and those it does not.

Of the 37 attacks inspired by jihadist ideology in Europe since 2014, 29 were ISIS-inspired.<sup>c</sup> For

<sup>b</sup> Those attacks are: Joshua Cummings’ January 2017 shooting in Denver, Colorado, that killed one person; Abdul Razak Ali Artan’s November 2016 stabbing and vehicular attack at Ohio State University that injured 11 people; Ahmad Khan Rahami’s September 2016 bombings in New York and New Jersey that injured 31 people; Wasil Farooqui’s August 2016 stabbing attack in Roanoke, Virginia, that injured two people; Omar Mateen’s June 2016 shooting attack in Orlando that killed 49; Edward Archer’s January 2016 shooting in Philadelphia that injured one person; the December 2015 attack in San Bernardino, California, that killed 14; Faisal Mohammad’s November 2015 stabbing at the University of California Merced campus that injured four people; Zale Thompson’s October 2014 hatchet attack in Queens, New York, that injured two people; Alton Nolen’s September 2014 beheading attack in Oklahoma that killed one person; and Ali Muhammad Brown’s killing spree over the spring and summer of 2014 in Washington state and New Jersey that killed four people.

example, on March 22, 2017, Khalid Masood, a 52-year-old British-born convert with a lengthy criminal record, killed five people when he drove a car into people near Westminster Palace.<sup>39</sup> Although Masood used the encrypted message service WhatsApp before his attack and though his attack was claimed by ISIS, no evidence has emerged demonstrating an operational connection to ISIS or its networks.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to the 11 attacks inspired by ISIS in the United States since 2014, there have been three attacks in which the attacker was inspired by jihadist ideology more generally.<sup>d</sup> For example, on June 21, 2017, Amor Ftouhi, a 49-year-old Canadian citizen originally from Tunisia, stabbed and injured a security guard at an airport in Flint, Michigan. While it is possible that Ftouhi was inspired by ISIS, his public comments suggest a more general motivation — including objections to the deaths of Syrians, Iraqis, and Afghans in the wars going on in their countries.<sup>41</sup>

### **Mentally Unstable Individuals Adopting/ Adopted by ISIS**

While ISIS and its affiliates are able to carefully select operatives for attacks that they direct, the groups have far less control over who commits inspired or enabled attacks. As a result, unstable individuals will sometimes carry out attacks and ISIS will often quickly adopt these attackers, even though ISIS had no connection to the plot.

This seems to be the case of 31-year-old Tunisian Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, whose violent personality so frightened his family that he was prescribed antipsychotic drugs when he was a teenager.<sup>48</sup> During Bastille Day celebrations on July 14, 2016, Bouhlel killed 86 people in Nice, France, using a large truck as a weapon.<sup>49</sup> ISIS' overseer of operations in the West, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, had called two years earlier for attacks using vehicles as weapons.

Bouhlel never attended his neighborhood mosque. He smoked pot, drank heavily, ate pork, chased women, and had had a number of run-ins with the law for violence. He also beat his wife, who then divorced him. Bouhlel was so incensed by his wife leaving him that he defecated in their apartment. Bouhlel, in short, was a violent loser who may have been on the edge of psychosis. After Bouhlel's massacre, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls astutely observed that ISIS "gives unstable individuals an ideological kit that allows them to make sense of their acts."<sup>50</sup> This echoed the conclusions of leading American forensic psychologist Reid Meloy, who with his British colleague Jessica Yakeley published a 2014 study of terrorists with no connections to formal terrorist organizations.<sup>51</sup>

Meloy, who works as a consultant with the FBI's behavioral analysts, framed the initial stage leading to violence as "grievance," and his explanation of what that means is worth quoting at length, as it fittingly summarizes Bouhlel's rancor. According to

<sup>c</sup> No ISIS connection was found in the following attacks: the knife attack on Belgian soldiers in Brussels in August 2017 that injured one; the Buckingham Palace knife attack on police in London in August 2017 that injured three; the vehicle attack on French soldiers in Paris in August 2017 that injured six; the March 2017 attack near London's Westminster Palace that killed five people; the March 2017 attack at Paris' Orly Airport that injured two people; the April 2016 bomb attack at a Sikh temple in Essen, Germany, that injured three people; the February 2015 stabbing attack at a Jewish community center in Nice, France, that injured two people; and the December 2014 vehicle ramming attack in Dijon, France, that injured 11 people.

<sup>d</sup> In addition to Ftouhi's attack described in the text, Muhammad Abdulazeed's 2015 attacks on a recruiting station and another military facility in Chattanooga, Tennessee, that killed five people and Dahir Adan's September 2016 stabbing attack in Minnesota that injured nine people lack clear evidence of ISIS inspiration.

## Citing ISIS but Not ISIS-Inspired: The Fort Lauderdale Shooting

On Jan. 6, 2017, Esteban Santiago-Ruiz traveled from Alaska to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, by plane. After claiming his baggage, he retrieved a gun from his luggage and opened fire, killing five people. According to the FBI, Santiago told them he had conducted the attack on behalf of ISIS.<sup>42</sup> However, he also told them that he was under government mind control.<sup>43</sup> Santiago was later diagnosed with both schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder.<sup>44</sup> In addition, two months before the attack, Santiago had walked into the FBI office in Anchorage to say that he was hearing voices ordering him to watch ISIS videos.<sup>45</sup> According to the FBI, while Santiago claimed to have visited ISIS chatrooms, their review of his computer usage found no evidence of contact with a terrorist organization.<sup>46</sup> In addition, interviews of family members and other witnesses during the investigation did not find evidence to support a terrorist motive.<sup>47</sup> While it is not impossible that Santiago was inspired by terrorist propaganda, the existing evidence suggests that his attack was related to his mental health challenges and other personal problems and not a politically motivated attack.

When a group like ISIS becomes prominent enough, it may become a bug-light for a variety of disturbed individuals who are not actually inspired by the group's ideology.

Meloy, the pathway begins with “an event or series of events that involve loss and often humiliation of the subject, his or her continual rumination about the loss, and the blaming of others. Most people with grievances *eventually grieve their loss*, but for those unwilling or unable to do so, often the most narcissistically sensitive individuals, it is much easier to convert their shame into rage toward the object which they believe is the cause of all their suffering. Such intense grievances require that individuals take no personal responsibility for their failures in life ... they are ‘injustice collectors.’”<sup>52</sup>

What follows this stage, Meloy says, is “moral outrage”: “He embeds his personal grievance in an historical, religious, or political cause or event. The suffering of others, which may be misperceived or actual, provides emotional fuel for his personal grievance.”<sup>53</sup> Personal grievance and moral outrage are then “framed by an ideology.” The nature of the ideology is secondary; its function is to allow the perpetrator some justification for the violent act he is planning. Meloy explains: “Upon closer

examination, these conscious belief systems are quite superficial; subjects will cherry pick phrases from the relevant authoritative text to justify their desire to kill others. ... This framing is absolutist and simplistic, providing a clarity that both rationalizes behavior and masks other, more personal grievances.”<sup>54</sup>

### A Case Study: The Terrorist as “Loser”

President Donald Trump, in the aftermath of the Manchester bombing at the Ariana Grande concert in May 2017, referred to the perpetrator of the attack and others like him as “losers.” Trump said, “So many young, beautiful, innocent people living and enjoying their lives murdered by evil losers in life. I will call them from now on losers because that’s what they are. They’re losers.”<sup>55</sup>

“Loser” is indeed an apt term for many “lone-wolf”/ lone-actor terrorists who are often failures and attention seekers looking to become the heroes in

their own stories. ISIS, whose marketing efforts and glossy publications make for convincing propaganda tools, provides the ideological vehicle on which these “losers” can anchor their grievances while purportedly acting heroically under the false banner of ISIS.

The Orlando terrorist, Omar Mateen, provides a telling case study of the complex stew of personal grievances and ideology involved in ISIS-inspired violence. As in the cases examined by Meloy, Mateen took his personal grievances and framed them around the ideology of ISIS so that he was no longer the disappointed wannabe cop in a dead-end job that he actually was, but instead — by pledging himself to ISIS as he carried out his massacre — a heroic holy warrior.

**Mateen took his personal grievances and framed them around the ideology of ISIS so that he was no longer the disappointed wannabe cop in a dead-end job that he actually was, but instead—by pledging himself to ISIS as he carried out his massacre—a heroic holy warrior.**

Mateen was not a young hothead. He was 29 at the time of the 2016 attack, had been married twice, had a 3-year-old son, was employed as a security guard at a golf resort community and had no criminal convictions. There is no evidence he suffered from mental illness. Mateen resembles many of the individuals accused of jihadist terrorism-related crimes in the United States since 9/11. Among the 415 individuals accused of such crimes, the average age was 29, more than a third were married and a third had children. Fewer than one in four have a known criminal record; in comparison, a third of Americans have a criminal record.<sup>56</sup> About 13 percent either were diagnosed with a mental health issue or were credibly reported to be suffering from

a mental health issue. (According to the National Institutes of Health, about 18 percent of Americans experience a diagnosable mental health condition in a given year.)<sup>57</sup>

As Mohammed Malik, a member of the local Muslim community who knew Mateen and who had reported him to the FBI after Mateen told him he had been watching videos of Anwar al-Awlaki, commented: “He hadn’t committed any acts of violence and wasn’t planning any, as far as I knew. And I thought he probably wouldn’t, because he didn’t fit the profile: He already had a second wife and a son. But it was something agents should keep their eyes on.”<sup>58</sup>

Yet underneath Mateen’s seemingly normal exterior, there were clear warning signs. Mateen did have a history of violence — domestic violence. Sitora Yusufiy, Mateen’s first wife, told the *Washington Post*: “He beat me. He would just come home and start beating me up because the laundry wasn’t finished or something like that.”<sup>59</sup> Noor Salman, Mateen’s second wife, who was charged with aiding and abetting Mateen and obstructing justice, also reported that Mateen beat her.<sup>60</sup>

A history of domestic violence or sexual crime is common among perpetrators of terrorist violence as well as perpetrators of mass violence more generally. Of the 13 jihadists who have conducted the 11 lethal attacks inside the United States since 9/11, five — more than a third — had reported histories of committing domestic violence or other sexual crimes. This is not a phenomenon restricted to jihadist terrorists. Of 59 perpetrators of lethal political violence since 9/11 motivated by jihadist, far-right or black-nationalist ideology, nearly a quarter had a history of domestic violence or sexual crime.<sup>61</sup> When the advocacy group Everytown for Gun Safety surveyed mass shootings in the United States from 2009 to 2013, it found that 57 percent of these shootings involved the death of an intimate partner or spouse.<sup>62</sup>

Mateen did not have a criminal record but, in addition to his domestic violence, he had a long

## The Continuing Influence of Anwar al-Awlaki

Lost in the intense coverage of the ISIS-inspired threat in the United States is the continuing influence of the American-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, whose sermons and writings on the importance of jihad have appeared in 116 jihadist terrorism cases since 9/11, according to New America's research. Al-Awlaki was killed in a drone strike in Yemen in 2011, but killing the man turned out to be easier than killing his ideas; since his death, al-Awlaki's writings have turned up in 72 terrorism cases in the United States.

history of disruptive behavior. As a child, Mateen was angry and disruptive in class, and at age 14, he was expelled from high school for fighting.<sup>63</sup> On the morning of the 9/11 attacks, Mateen told classmates that Osama bin Laden was his uncle.<sup>64</sup> As an adult, relatives say, Mateen expressed homophobic views, while coworkers remember that he claimed to have connections to both al-Qaeda and Hezbollah, groups that are at war with each other.

Mateen had a job as a security guard at a local golf resort, but his larger career goals had stalled. He desperately wanted to be a cop and took selfies of himself wearing New York Police Department shirts, but he was dismissed from a Florida police-training academy in 2007 because he threatened to bring a gun to campus and was falling asleep in class.<sup>65</sup> In 2015, eight years later, Mateen tried once again

to become a police officer, applying to the police academy at Indian River State College in Fort Pierce, Florida. He was turned down because he admitted to using marijuana in the past and because of what the college termed “discrepancies” in his application form.<sup>66</sup>

Mateen appears to have translated these various personal troubles into an adoption of jihadist ideology. He began to watch videos of Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born cleric whose writings on jihad have consistently appeared in terrorism cases in the West.<sup>67</sup> The FBI had investigated Mateen twice before the Orlando attack — in 2013, after he made comments to coworkers about claimed terrorist ties, and again in 2014, as a result of his connection to Moner Abu-Salha, an American from Mateen's community who had conducted a suicide bombing against Syrian troops for al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, the Nusra Front.<sup>68</sup> The FBI concluded that Mateen's connection to Abu-Salha was minimal.

Mateen's grievances festered. Three weeks before his attack, one of the leaders of ISIS publicly urged sympathizers of the group to carry out attacks in the West during the coming holy month of Ramadan.<sup>69</sup> In a 911 call Mateen made from the nightclub as he was carrying out his massacre, he pledged himself to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. By following this directive, carrying out an attack as a self-styled “Islamic fighter” pledging allegiance to ISIS, Mateen was finally the heroic figure he believed himself to be. A day after the massacre, ISIS's official radio station, Al-Bayan, claimed him as one of the “soldiers of the caliphate in America.”<sup>70</sup>

It would be absurd to dispute that Mateen's attack was inspired by ISIS, yet Mateen's connection to ISIS was only aspirational; he wasn't trained, directed, or financed by the group. Like every other deadly jihadist attacker in the United States since 9/11, Mateen lacked a formal relationship with a foreign terrorist organization; he self-radicalized.

# THE WAR ON ISIS AND OTHER EXTREMIST GROUPS

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## ISIS in Retreat

By September 2016, it was already clear that ISIS was in retreat. It had lost key Iraqi cities including Baiji, Fallujah, Ramadi, and Tikrit, as well as the Syrian city of Manbij. The coalition also reported killing tens of thousands of ISIS fighters and at least 134 ISIS leaders. ISIS was forced to cut salaries for its fighters and saw the flow of foreign fighters dwindle from a high of 2,000 per month to fewer than 50 per month.<sup>71 72</sup>

This was the result of ISIS' incoherent strategy. When the group stuck to its goal of conquering territory in Iraq and Syria in order to create a "caliphate" where it ruled as a self-styled "Islamic State," it seized territory the size of the United Kingdom with a population the size of Switzerland. But when it began publicly murdering American journalists in the summer of 2014, the United States quickly assembled a global coalition that conducted thousands of airstrikes against ISIS and mounted significant ground operations against the group.

ISIS' retreat and setbacks have continued in 2017. The year began with Iraqi forces backed by the coalition successfully retaking eastern Mosul from ISIS in January 2017.<sup>73</sup> In August 2017 Brett McGurk, the U.S. special presidential envoy for the

Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, estimated that ISIS had ceded operational control in 78 percent of its territory in Iraq and 58 percent of what it controlled in Syria.<sup>74 75</sup>

On June 21, 2017, ISIS destroyed the leaning minaret of Mosul's famous Al-Nuri Mosque, from which ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi spoke in 2014 after seizing the city. (ISIS falsely claimed the mosque was damaged by an airstrike.)<sup>76</sup> This was widely described as a symbolic defeat for ISIS, given the mosque's importance to the group's initial claim to be establishing the caliphate.<sup>77</sup> By the end of June, Iraqi forces had retaken the mosque.<sup>78</sup> On July 9, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared the entirety of Mosul liberated from ISIS, despite remaining pockets of individual ISIS fighters still lurking in western parts of the city.<sup>79</sup>

ISIS is also losing in Syria. The U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) cleared the Great Mosque of Raqqa— the oldest in the city and under ISIS control since 2014 – and liberated the Old City of Raqqa from ISIS on September 2, 2017.<sup>80</sup> The SDF claims to now hold 65 percent of Raqqa.<sup>81</sup> The loss of its territory in Iraq and Syria dramatically undercuts ISIS' claim that it is the caliphate, because the caliphate has historically been both a substantial geographic entity, such as the Ottoman

Empire, as well as a theological construct.<sup>82</sup>

According to Gen. Tony Thomas, commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command, as of July 2017 the coalition has killed between 60,000 and 70,000 ISIS fighters.<sup>83</sup> In May 2017, the United Nations estimated that the number of total ISIS fighters in Iraq and Syria had fallen to between 12,000 and 20,000.<sup>84</sup>

Among the key leaders killed in 2017:

- **Fawaz Muhammad Jubayr al-Rawi:** On June 16, Fawaz Muhammad Jubayr al-Rawi was killed in an airstrike in Abu Kamal, Syria. He was a key ISIS financier who, according to a U.S. Central Command press release, “moved millions of dollars for the terror organization’s attack and logistics network.”<sup>85</sup>
- **Baraa Kadek:** In May, a coalition airstrike reportedly killed Baraa Kadek, the founder of ISIS’ news website, Amaq, through which it claimed responsibility for attacks around the world.<sup>86</sup>
- **Turki Bin Ali:** On May 31, the United States killed Turki Bin Ali, a key ideological and religious leader in ISIS who also played a critical role in facilitating foreign fighter travel to Syria and Iraq, in an airstrike in Mayadin, Syria.<sup>87</sup> Bin Ali was widely considered a potential replacement in the event of the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.<sup>88</sup>
- **Abu-Khattab al-Rawi:** On May 18, Abu-Khattab al-Rawi, who organized ISIS’ procurement and use of drones in Iraq’s Anbar province and worked directly with ISIS’ top leadership, was killed in an operation near Qaim, Iraq.<sup>89</sup>
- **Abu Asim al-Jazaeri:** On May 11, Abu Asim al-Jazaeri, an ISIS external operations planner and key figure in its youth training program “Cubs of the Caliphate,” was killed in an airstrike in Mayadin, Syria.<sup>90</sup>

- **Mustafa Gunes:** On April 27, Mustafa Gunes, an ISIS operations planner, was killed in an airstrike in Mayadin, Syria.<sup>91</sup>

Among those killed in 2016 were Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, who was ISIS’ emir in Syria, its principal spokesman, a key organizer of attacks on the West and a reputed possible replacement in the case of al-Baghdadi’s death; Sami al-Jabouri, who led ISIS’ oil exploitation effort; and Omar al-Shishani, a prominent Chechen ISIS commander.<sup>92</sup>

In addition, the anti-ISIS coalition has successfully targeted many of the key virtual recruiters who have allowed ISIS to reach out and enable attacks.<sup>93</sup>

Among the virtual recruiters who have been killed or captured:

- **Rachid Kassim:** In February 2017, a U.S. airstrike killed Rachid Kassim, a French national fighting for ISIS in Syria who had been in contact with the terrorists who carried out the killing of a priest at a church in Normandy, France, in July 2016 and the Facebook live-streamed murder of a couple in Magnanville, France, in June 2016.<sup>94</sup>
- **Neil Prakash:** In November 2016, Turkey captured Neil Prakash, an Australian ISIS recruiter linked to a variety of plots in Australia.<sup>95</sup>
- **Raphael Hostey:** In April 2016, Raphael Hostey, a British ISIS recruiter, was killed in an airstrike.<sup>96</sup>
- **Abu Sa’ad al-Sudani (Abu Isa al-Amriki):** In April 2016, a U.S. airstrike in Syria killed Sudanese national Abu Sa’ad al-Sudani, who had been in contact over the internet with a wide range of plotters including individuals in the United States.<sup>97</sup>
- **Junaid Hussain:** In August 2015, a U.S. airstrike reportedly killed Junaid Hussain, the 21-year-old British hacker who helped enable the Garland,

Texas, attack by Elton Simpson and Nadir Soofi.<sup>98</sup>

Coalition raids directed at ISIS officials, as well as ISIS' territorial losses, provided the coalition with significant intelligence hauls about ISIS operations and leaders.<sup>99</sup>

While ISIS' retreat continued in 2017, three challenges caution against overoptimism regarding the swift defeat of the group.

**1. Resilience as a Terrorist Organization:** A foundational challenge to the defeat of ISIS is the group's proven ability to continue operating as a resilient terrorist organization even after territorial defeats. The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point reviewed more than 1,400 ISIS attacks in 16 cities that had been liberated from ISIS — 11 in Iraq and five in Syria — and found that while taking territory back from ISIS was a positive development, “pushing the Islamic State out as the formal governing party in a territory is not a sufficient development when it comes to ending the group's ability to enact violence against individuals in Iraq and Syria.”<sup>100</sup> This is not a new phenomenon. In 2011, New America fellow Brian Fishman noted that while casualties in Iraq's civil war had declined overall during the successes of the surge, terrorism remained “rampant” and the Islamic State of Iraq — an al-Qaeda affiliate that later morphed into ISIS — remained capable of conducting major attacks.<sup>101</sup>

**2. Unresolved Governance Failures and Conflicts:** Another challenge is posed by the coalition's failure to resolve an interlocking set of governance failures and conflicts in Iraq. ISIS was never the root of the security challenge in Iraq, but a symptom of larger failures of

governance.<sup>102</sup> Beyond the difficult challenge of reasserting effective governance in areas previously held by ISIS, transregional conflicts and tensions — including the questions of Kurdish statehood, of Turkey's role in the region and of a stable end-state for Syria, as well as Sunni-Shia sectarian tensions — will keep driving conflict. If the intertwined regional conflicts are not resolved, the United States and its allies may once again find themselves having won the battle only to lose in “Phase IV” reconstruction and stabilization efforts, as happened previously in Iraq.<sup>103</sup>

**3. ISIS Affiliates and the Virtual Caliphate:** A final challenge is posed by ISIS' affiliates outside of Syria and Iraq as well as by its online presence. Libya is often discussed as a potential fallback for ISIS, yet ISIS has been pushed out of the territory it has held there.<sup>104</sup> That said, the 2017 Manchester bombing, which was directed by ISIS in Libya, demonstrates the potential for ISIS to use its affiliates, even those that are themselves under pressure, to maintain its campaigns. ISIS' virtual presence and role as a brand may enable it to continue its operations even amidst significant territorial losses.

## The Resiliency of al-Qaeda

Even as ISIS suffers repeated setbacks, al-Qaeda has shown surprising resiliency in the face of the counterterrorism campaigns directed against it and the challenge from within the jihadist<sup>e</sup> movement posed by the rise of ISIS. As the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, Nicholas Rasmussen, explained at the July 2017 Aspen Security Forum, “Not a day goes by where al-Qaeda and the range of al-Qaeda threats we're managing around the world is not top priority.”<sup>105</sup>

<sup>e</sup> We use the term jihadist because that is the kind of terminology that Sunni Salafi terrorists have adopted to describe themselves. We are aware that jihad has a variety of meanings, including internal struggle, rather than exclusively meaning a holy war.

A decade and a half after 9/11, al-Qaeda continues to operate regionally despite the heavy losses it has sustained, including the death of its founder, Osama bin Laden, and of dozens of other al-Qaeda leaders killed in drone strikes in Pakistan and Yemen. Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb all retain capacity for sustained local attacks.

Al-Qaeda in Syria has undergone cosmetic changes to its naming and organizational design, but without truly renouncing its affiliation with its mother organization. Initially known as the Nusra Front, al-Qaeda in Syria adopted the name Jabhat Fatah al-Sham in July 2016 to distance itself from al-Qaeda Core, though then-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper labeled it a “PR move ... to create the image of being more moderate.”<sup>106</sup> In January 2017 another rebranding occurred, with the group taking the name Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham.<sup>107</sup> Regardless of the shifting monikers, al-Qaeda in Syria remains a potent force, as seen by the group’s takeover of Idlib, a prominent city and province in the country’s northwest corner, in July 2017.<sup>108</sup>

While al-Qaeda has sustained its ability to operate locally, the last deadly attack in the West directed by al-Qaeda was the 2005 bombing of London’s transportation system, which killed 52 commuters. (Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, or AQAP, trained two brothers in Yemen in 2011 who four years later attacked the Paris offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, a satirical magazine. It’s far from clear if AQAP had any real role in this attack beyond providing training years before the attack took place.)

Al-Qaeda appears to be grooming one of bin Laden’s sons, Hamza, to be a next-generation leader of the group. Hamza, in his late 20s, has long been an al-Qaeda true believer. In May 2017, al-Qaeda released audio in which Hamza called for attacks on the West.<sup>109</sup>

Al-Qaeda’s resiliency and its preparation of a next-generation leadership raise the possibility that it

could reemerge as a substantial threat to the West. It is also likely that al-Qaeda could feed off of ISIS’ setbacks to regain leadership of the global jihadist movement.<sup>110</sup> The possibility of parts of ISIS and al-Qaeda merging cannot be ruled out. Though the two groups are sworn enemies, discussions between emissaries of their leaders, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, were said to be taking place as of April 2017, according to Iraqi Vice President Ayad Allawi.<sup>111</sup>

At the very least, al-Qaeda’s ability to remain resilient after 16 years of counterterrorism efforts suggests that ISIS or at least its remnants may similarly be able to continue on long after it loses its hold on much of Syria and Iraq.

**Al-Qaeda’s ability to remain resilient after 16 years of counterterrorism efforts suggests that ISIS or at least its remnants may similarly be able to continue on long after it loses its hold on much of Syria and Iraq.**

### **U.S. Targeted-Killing Program and the Evolution of Counterterrorism Policy Under President Trump**

Under President Trump, the military campaign against ISIS and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula persists, with significant changes to drone policy and the escalation of counterterrorism operations by U.S. Special Operations forces. The drone and counterterrorism war inherited by the Trump administration included a drone war in Pakistan that had paused under President Barack Obama, and intensifying counterterrorism and drone campaigns in Yemen and Somalia. Upon assuming leadership, the Trump administration began a review at senior levels of the National Security Council to roll back Obama-era restrictions on these operations.<sup>112</sup>

U.S. officials speaking to the *Washington Post* outlined the intentions of the review, describing it as an effort to “make it easier for the Pentagon to launch counterterrorism strikes anywhere in the world by lowering the threshold on acceptable civilian casualties and scaling back other constraints imposed by the Obama administration.”<sup>113</sup>

On Jan. 29, 2017, as the review was underway, President Trump authorized a Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) ground raid in Yakla, Yemen. Trump characterized the raid as a success, though it resulted in the death of Chief Petty Officer William Owens, who was a member of the Navy’s SEAL Team 6, and reportedly killed as many as 23 civilians, including children.<sup>114</sup> The 8-year-old daughter of Anwar al-Awlaki was reportedly among the dead. The Yemeni government briefly withdrew authorization for JSOC operations in the country in response to the local backlash, but has since reversed the order.

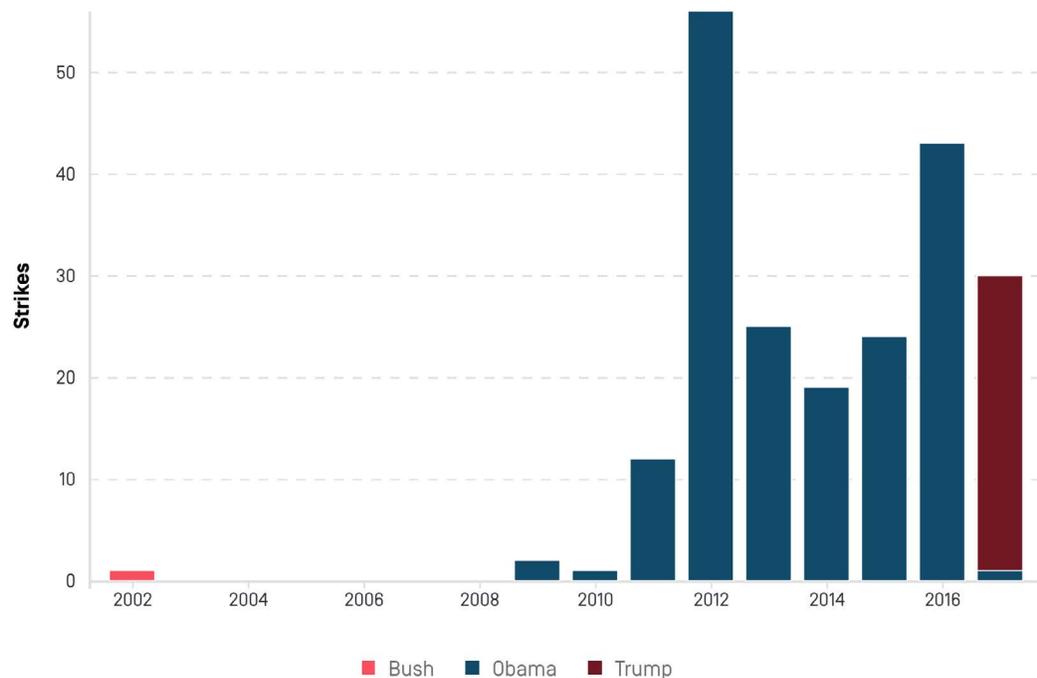
Key counterterrorism policy changes under Trump include:

- **Loosened rules of engagement in Yemen:** Trump approved a Pentagon request to designate parts of three Yemeni provinces as “areas of active hostilities.” This gives the military authority to take action against terrorist targets at its own discretion, removing restraints on conducting airstrikes, drone strikes, and ground raids.<sup>115</sup>
- **Loosened rules of engagement in Somalia:** On March 29, 2017, Trump granted the Pentagon’s request to designate the entirety of Somalia as an “area of active hostilities” for 180 days.<sup>116</sup> Gen. Thomas Waldhauser, commander for the U.S. Africa Command, confirmed in a press briefing: “We’ve been given authority to assist AMISOM forces that are on missions where, if they cannot take care of the situation on their own, then we are authorized to assist them there. We are also authorized to develop targets on our own and take appropriate action

if required.”<sup>117</sup> AMISOM refers to the African Union Mission in Somalia.

- **Higher civilian casualties in Iraq and Syria:** U.S.-led coalition efforts in Iraq and Syria have produced higher civilian casualties at higher rates under Trump than under Obama, according to an Airwars investigation.<sup>118</sup> Airwars, a London-based group that carefully tracks civilian casualties in conflict zones, asserts that civilian deaths in Iraq and Syria stand at more than 2,200 under Trump. A lower estimate of 603 civilian deaths in Iraq and Syria since June 2014 that was produced by the U.S.-led coalition also showed an uptick in civilians killed under the current administration.<sup>119</sup>
- **Transfer of operational authority from the White House to the Pentagon:** In a proposal to the president, Defense Secretary James Mattis recommended decreasing the decision-making time in the field by ceding tactical decision-making to the Pentagon.<sup>120</sup> Trump obliged, giving autonomy to commanders to authorize strikes.
- **Expanded Central Intelligence Agency paramilitary authority:** The U.S. drone program began under the authority of the CIA. As the CIA is an intelligence-gathering organization, all of its paramilitary activities, including lethal operations such as drone strikes, are classified. This allowed the U.S. government to deny the existence of the program while simultaneously conducting strikes in countries where the U.S. was not at war. After years of pressure from nongovernmental organizations and human rights groups, the Obama administration shifted the program, in part, to the Department of Defense in an effort to increase the drone program’s transparency. The military publicly reports airstrikes and resulting civilian casualties.<sup>121</sup> In March 2017, in a departure from this Obama-era policy, Trump secretly granted the CIA new permissions to target and kill suspected militants, moving the program back into the shadows.<sup>122</sup>

**Figure 1 | U.S. Air Strikes, Drone Strikes, and Special Operations Raids in Yemen**



The Trump administration has maintained a steady pace of counterterrorism operations in Yemen. Counterterrorism operations under Obama were already rising — 43 strikes occurred in 2016, according to New America data. As of the first week of September 2017, 29 drone and ground operations had occurred in Yemen under Trump.

### Counterterrorism Activity in Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan<sup>f</sup>

For example, on March 2-6, 2017, the U.S. military conducted a series of drone attacks and airstrikes in Yemen, totaling 25 strikes by Pentagon estimates. The *New York Times* suggests that the number of strikes may have been as high as 40.<sup>123 124</sup> Local

reports cite eyewitness accounts of a secret Special Operations forces raid conducted in conjunction with the strikes against Saad bin Atef, commander of AQAP in al Shabwa province.<sup>125</sup> A Pentagon spokesman, Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, denied the substance of these local reports, but acknowledged that U.S. forces were deployed to that location during the relevant period, thus conceding at the least that U.S. ground forces were present to support the operation.

On April 24, 2017, Davis told DoD News, “Since February 28, we’ve conducted more than 80 precision strikes against AQAP militants, infrastructure, fighting positions and equipment.” He did not provide casualty estimates.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>f</sup> New America and the Department of Defense occasionally count strikes differently. For example, multiple drone strikes that occur in short succession (two hours or less) and in one specific geographic area are counted as one strike by New America. DoD at times reports numbers on series of strikes without detailing specific incidents (such as providing the precise locations of strikes or casualty numbers).

Yemeni Special Forces, supported by U.S. troops and forces from the United Arab Emirates, on Aug. 3, 2017, launched what the Department of Defense characterized as a “multi-day clearing operation.”<sup>127</sup> The initial announcement came via a statement released by the UAE Embassy in Washington. Pentagon spokesman Davis confirmed the operation the next day, acknowledging that a small contingent of American troops were in Yemen to share intelligence with coalition forces. The U.S. forces will also provide reconnaissance and mid-air refueling for coalition members. According to the *Washington Post*, this is the largest operation conducted in Yemen by this three-nation alliance since 2015.<sup>128</sup>

A larger number of civilian casualties has coincided with the broader authority delegated to commanders on the battlefield, particularly in Iraq and Syria. Responding in May 2017 to human rights critics of the policy, Secretary Mattis said at a Pentagon press briefing, “I want to emphasize here there has been no change to our rules of engagement, and there has been no change to our continued extraordinary efforts to avoid innocent civilian casualties.”<sup>129</sup> However, the Trump administration’s own numbers appear to complicate this statement. A July 2017 assessment by the Combined Joint Task Force reported, “It is more likely than not, at least 603 civilians have been unintentionally killed by Coalition strikes since the start of Operation Inherent Resolve” in June 2014.<sup>130</sup> According to an Airwars investigation, 40 percent of those 603 deaths occurred in the first four months of Trump’s presidency.<sup>131</sup> Also, Airwars researchers place their tally at nearly quadruple the administration’s count, reporting 2,200 civilian deaths in Iraq and Syria since the inauguration

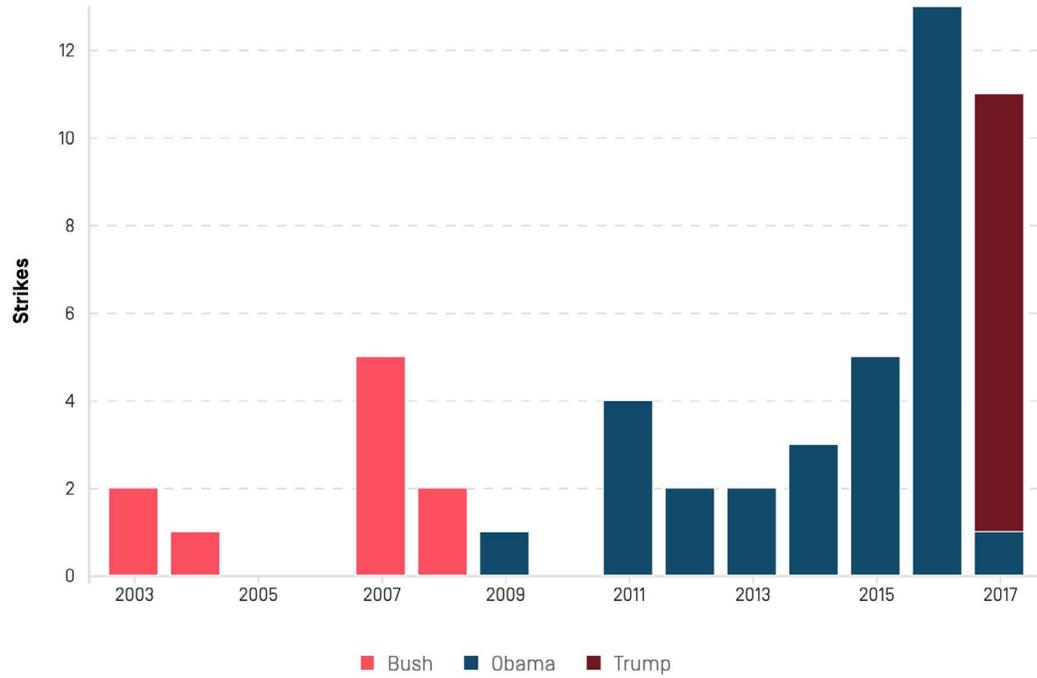
of the President Trump. Comparatively, Airwars estimates that 2,300 civilians were killed during the Obama administration.

In Somalia and Pakistan, U.S. counterterrorism operations are moving at a slower pace, but still are more intense than under Obama. Ten U.S. air and ground operations have occurred in Somalia under the Trump administration as of August 2017. That is more operations than in any year since the start of U.S. operations in Somalia in 2003, with the exception of 2016. On May 4, 2017, Kyle Milliken, a U.S. Navy SEAL, was killed in an “advise and assist” operation led by Somali forces.<sup>132</sup> Milliken was the first U.S. service member to be killed in Somalia since the Black Hawk Down incident in 1993.<sup>133</sup> (See figure 2 on page 23.)

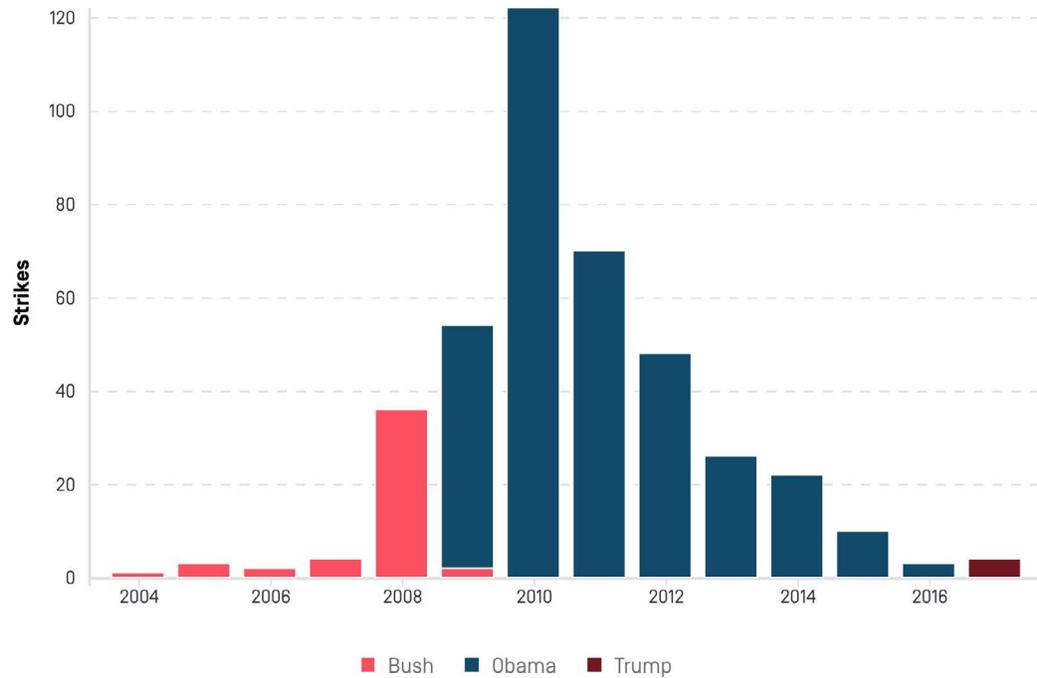
The last strike in Pakistan under the Obama administration occurred in May 2016, according to New America data. Four strikes have been conducted under Trump. (See figure 3 on page 23.)

In an address in August 2017, President Trump announced a “dramatic” shift in American policy in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and South Asia more broadly.<sup>134</sup> He refused to discuss troop numbers or set deadlines for the 16-year war in Afghanistan, instead indicating that the state of affairs in the field will determine future timetables. While committing to a comprehensive military, diplomatic and economic effort, the president resoundingly rejected “nation-building,” a strategy associated with the Bush and Obama administrations that is designed to strengthen government and civic institutions. Trump also signaled a harder position toward Pakistan and called on India to contribute economic assistance to Afghanistan.

**Figure 2 | U.S. Air Strikes, Drone Strikes, and Special Operations Raids in Somalia**



**Figure 3 | Drone Strikes in Pakistan**



Source: New America

# WHAT IS THE THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES?

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The most likely threat to the United States comes from terrorists inspired by ISIS or in contact with its virtual recruitment networks, as opposed to ISIS-directed attacks of the sort seen in Paris in 2015 and Brussels in 2016. The most typical threat to the United States remains homegrown rather than from infiltrating foreign nationals.

New America's "Terrorism in America After 9/11" project tracks the 415 cases of individuals who have been charged with jihadist terrorism-related activity in the United States since 9/11.<sup>8</sup> In the 16 years since the 9/11 attacks, individuals motivated by jihadist ideology have killed 95 people inside the United States. Every one of those deaths is a tragedy, but they are not national catastrophes as 9/11 was. The death toll from jihadist terrorism over the past 16 years is far lower than what even the most optimistic of analysts projected in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Al-Qaeda and its

breakaway faction, ISIS, have failed to direct a successful attack in the United States since the 9/11 attacks. Indeed, no foreign terrorist organization has carried out a successful attack in the United States since 9/11, and none of the perpetrators of the 11 lethal jihadist attacks in the United States since 9/11 received training from a foreign terrorist group.

This is in large part the result of the enormous investment the United States has made in strengthening its defenses against terrorism in the post-9/11 era. That effort has made the United States a hard target.<sup>135</sup> On 9/11, there were 16 people on the U.S. "No Fly" list.<sup>136</sup> In 2016, there were 81,000 people on the list.<sup>137</sup> In 2001, there were 35 Joint Terrorism Task Force "fusion centers," where multiple law enforcement agencies worked together to chase down leads and build terrorism cases.<sup>138</sup> A decade and a half later, there are more than 100.<sup>139</sup> Before 9/11, there was no Department of Homeland

<sup>8</sup> The data in this report consists of individuals accused of jihadist terrorism-related crimes since 9/11 who are either American citizens or who engaged in jihadist activity in the United States. The data also includes a small number of individuals who died before being charged but were widely reported to have engaged in jihadist criminal activity, as well as a small number of Americans charged in foreign courts. We define jihadists to include those who are motivated by versions of Osama bin Laden's global ideology or otherwise provide support to groups that follow a version of that ideology. We exclude cases linked to Hamas, Hezbollah and similar groups that do not follow bin Laden's ideology and do not target the United States.

Security, National Counterterrorism Center, or Transportation Security Administration.

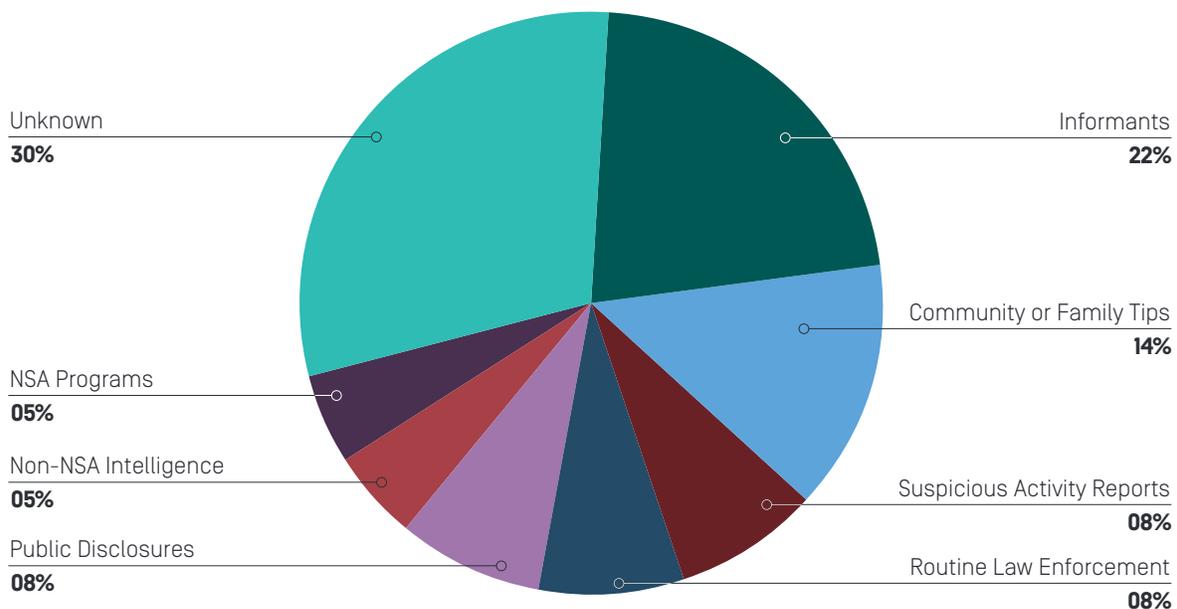
In addition, today the public is far more aware of the threat posed by jihadist terrorists. In December 2001, it was passengers on board an American Airlines jet that disabled the “shoe bomber,” Richard Reid.<sup>140</sup> Eight years later, it was again passengers who tackled the “underwear bomber,” Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, on Northwest Flight 253 as it flew over Detroit. The following year, it was a street vendor who spotted a suspicious SUV parked in Times Square that contained the bomb planted there by Pakistani Taliban recruit Faisal Shahzad.<sup>141</sup> Suspicious members of the public have provided tips that led to the initiation of investigations in 8 percent of the 379 terrorism cases since 9/11 that were prevented or detected before the perpetrator could carry out a plot.

In addition to the general public’s awareness, family members of accused terrorists and members of their local communities have also stepped up to

report suspicious activity. In 14 percent of jihadist terrorism cases since 9/11 that were prevented or detected prior to an attack, community or family members provided a tip that initiated the investigation — the second most important method of detecting terrorism suspects, surpassed only by informants, who initiated 22 percent of cases.

Among those detected thanks to tips from community and family members was Moner Abu Salha, a Floridian who traveled and fought with the Nusra Front in Syria before returning to the United States undetected. When he tried to recruit friends to join him in Syria, where he eventually died conducting a suicide attack against Syrian troops in 2014, one of his friends reported him to the FBI.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, it was a 911 call from the parents of North Carolinian Justin Sullivan in June 2015 that put him on the government’s radar.<sup>143</sup> Had it not been for that tip, Sullivan, who had already committed a murder and who was in contact with Junaid Hussain, an ISIS virtual recruiter, might have succeeded in his plot to conduct a lethal attack.<sup>144</sup>

**Figure 4 | Top Methods of Detection in the 379 Cases of Jihadist Terrorism Detected Since 9/11**



Adding to these defenses and law enforcement techniques are the U.S. campaigns overseas. In 2016, the United States allocated more than \$70 billion to intelligence activities.<sup>145</sup> Before 9/11, the budget was about a third of that — \$26 billion.<sup>146</sup> The covert U.S. drone war in Pakistan and Yemen has decimated the leadership of jihadist groups.<sup>147</sup> In 2015, a U.S. drone strike killed Nasir al-Wuhayshi, then al-Qaeda's second in command and the leader of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>148</sup> In May 2016, the United States killed the leader of the Taliban, Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, in a drone strike in Pakistan.<sup>149</sup> In July 2017, the United States killed Abu Sayed, the leader of ISIS' branch in Afghanistan; he was the third leader of the affiliate killed in an American strike in a year.<sup>150</sup>

**By the start of the Trump administration, the threat inside the United States was overwhelmingly lone-actor, ISIS-inspired attacks.**

By the start of the Trump administration, the threat inside the United States was overwhelmingly lone-actor, ISIS-inspired attacks such as the one in Orlando in June 2016. This threat has stressed law enforcement, given the diversity of the perpetrators and the lack of organization needed to conduct such an attack. However, it is a far cry from the type of attack that al-Qaeda carried out on 9/11.

Law enforcement and intelligence services will still need to combat and monitor the threat to the homeland from foreign terrorist organizations. Plots such as the 2009 underwear bomb attempt; the 2009 case in which three Americans trained with al-Qaeda and returned with a plan to bomb the New York City subway; and the 2010 failed Times Square bombing by Faisal Shahzad, who trained with the Pakistani Taliban, are sufficient reminders of this fact.

## **The Threat in the United States Is ISIS-Inspired and ISIS-Enabled, but Not ISIS-Directed**

Since 2014, the year ISIS burst onto the global scene after seizing Mosul and declaring the caliphate, there have been six deadly jihadist attacks in the United States. Seventy-four people were killed, accounting for more than three-quarters of all deaths caused by jihadists in the United States since the 9/11 attacks. Five of the six were ISIS-inspired attacks, the exception being Muhammad Youssef Abdulazeez's 2015 attacks at a recruiting station and another military facility in Chattanooga, Tennessee, inspired by jihadist ideology in general.

- In January 2017, Joshua Cummings, a 37-year-old white convert to Islam from Texas, shot and killed a transit guard in Denver, Colorado. In the aftermath of the attack, Cummings pledged allegiance to ISIS.<sup>151</sup> ISIS did not claim Cummings' attack.
- In June 2016, Omar Mateen killed 49 people in a shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. Mateen pledged allegiance to ISIS on social media the day of the attack.<sup>152</sup> Unlike the case of Cummings, ISIS eagerly claimed Mateen's attack.
- In December 2015, Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik killed 14 people in an attack in San Bernardino, California. The attackers pledged allegiance to ISIS via Facebook.<sup>153</sup> ISIS claimed the attack, though the Arabic version of the claim described the attackers only as supporters of ISIS.<sup>154</sup> Shortly after the attack, then-FBI Director James Comey said the FBI had not found any evidence of contact between Farook and Malik and foreign terrorists.<sup>155</sup>
- In July 2015, Muhammad Youssef Abdulazeez fatally shot five people at military facilities in Chattanooga, Tennessee. In December 2015, Comey stated, "There is no doubt that the Chattanooga killer was inspired, motivated by foreign terrorist organization propaganda," but

he also said it was difficult to determine which group specifically inspired him.<sup>156</sup> Abdulazeez did not pledge allegiance to ISIS, and ISIS did not claim the attack.

- In September 2014, Alton Nolen beheaded a coworker of his at the Vaughn Foods processing center in Moore, Oklahoma. Nolen had an ISIS flag in his car and his social media activity suggested he was influenced by jihadist ideology.<sup>157</sup> ISIS had no direct involvement in the attack.
- From April to June 2014, Ali Muhammad Brown killed four people in a killing spree across Washington state and New Jersey, writing in his journal that he supported ISIS and telling police that he committed the killings in retaliation for American foreign policy.<sup>158</sup> Brown did not receive operational direction from ISIS.

A number of these attackers had personal troubles. This should warn against explaining their acts simply as motivated by militant Islamist ideology:

- Joshua Cummings had clashed with multiple people in his community. His local newspaper in Texas, the *Pampa News*, had stopped publishing his stories on martial arts — Cummings had taught martial arts classes at a studio in Pampa — in 2015 due to his obsessions and conspiracy theorizing.<sup>159</sup>
- Omar Mateen had a long history of stalled career goals, disruptive behavior and domestic violence, discussed in further detail in the section laying out a typology of ISIS attacks.
- Mohammad Abdulazeez suffered from depression.<sup>160</sup>
- There are significant questions regarding Alton Nolen’s mental health. Though he was ruled competent to stand trial, Nolen’s defense presented evidence that he suffers from mental health issues, and the psychologist cited by the prosecution acknowledged he had

symptoms of mental illness but argued there was not enough for a diagnosis.<sup>161</sup> In addition, Nolen’s attack was triggered by his suspension from work, albeit seemingly for a complaint regarding his racial politics.<sup>162</sup> He reportedly told police he was motivated by what he viewed as discrimination in the workplace.<sup>163</sup> Nolen also had a criminal history involving drug charges and assault and battery of a police officer, for which he served two years in prison.<sup>164</sup>

- Ali Muhammad Brown was in the midst of what the judge in his case called a “downward spiral of criminality,” having previously been convicted of bank fraud, assault, and communication with a minor for immoral purposes.<sup>165</sup>

With one exception, every lethal jihadist attacker in the U.S. since 2014 has used one or more firearms. The one exception was Nolen’s use of a knife in the beheading. (While the San Bernardino attackers had built pipe bombs, they failed to work.)<sup>166</sup>

There have also been nine non-lethal terrorist attacks in the United States since 2014 by individuals motivated by jihadist ideology.

- On June 21, 2017, Amor Ftouhi, a 49-year-old dual Canadian-Tunisian citizen, stabbed and injured a security guard at the airport in Flint, Michigan, yelling “Allahu Akbar!” and referencing U.S. actions in Syria.<sup>167</sup>
- In November 2016, Abdul Razak Ali Artan, an 18-year-old permanent resident who had come to the United States as a refugee from Somalia after living in Pakistan, injured 11 people after ramming his vehicle into and proceeding to stab people with a knife at Ohio State University.<sup>168</sup> ISIS claimed the attack, and Artan had made a Facebook posting citing Anwar al-Awlaki prior to the attack.<sup>169</sup>
- In September 2016, Dahir Adan, a 20-year-old Somali-American, injured 10 people when he went on a stabbing rampage at a mall

in Minnesota. ISIS claimed the attack, but investigators have found no direct link to the group.<sup>170</sup>

- Also in September 2016, Ahmad Khan Rahami, a 28-year-old whose journal mentioned both ISIS and al-Qaeda leaders, detonated bombs in Manhattan and the Jersey Shore, injuring 29 people.<sup>171</sup>
- In August 2016, Wasil Farooqui, a 20-year-old who according to police said he was hearing voices, attacked people with a knife in Roanoke, Virginia.<sup>172</sup> Farooqui had reportedly attempted to travel to fight in Syria in the past.<sup>173</sup>
- In January 2016, Edward Archer, a 30-year-old African-American man, shot and injured a police officer in Philadelphia. Archer claimed to be loyal to ISIS.<sup>174</sup>
- In November 2015, Faisal Mohammad, a student at the University of California, Merced, stabbed and injured four people on the campus.<sup>175</sup> According to the FBI, he had visited pro-ISIS websites, read its propaganda and had a printout of the ISIS flag in his backpack.<sup>176</sup>
- In May 2015, Elton Simpson, 30, and Nadir Soofi, 34, opened fire on an “art contest” in Garland, Texas, organized by the American Freedom Defense Initiative that involved drawing cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. Simpson exchanged tweets with Mujahid Miski and Junaid Hussain, two well-known ISIS virtual recruiters who were based in Somalia and Syria, respectively, in the run-up to the attack.<sup>177</sup> This was the only ISIS-enabled — as opposed to ISIS-inspired — attack in the United States.
- In October 2014, Zale Thompson attacked four police officers in Queens, New York, with a hatchet. According to New York City police, he was inspired by terrorist propaganda including that of ISIS.<sup>178</sup>

With the exception of the attack in Garland, Texas, these attacks were ISIS-inspired where ISIS did not play an operational role or provide direction. In addition, with the exception of Rahami’s bombings, Edward Archer’s shooting, and the Garland shooting, these attacks utilized bladed weapons or vehicular ramming — methods that may explain their lack of lethality compared to the firearms used by almost all of the lethal terrorist attackers since 2014.

While the attack in Garland has been the only ISIS-enabled attack in the United States, there have been several foiled plots in which ISIS’ virtual recruiters sought to encourage and aid attacks.<sup>179</sup> These include a foiled plan by three men in Boston in June 2015 to attack Pamela Geller, the organizer of the Prophet Mohammed cartoon contest in Garland.

One case in particular that illustrates the danger of ISIS-enabled plots is that of Justin Sullivan. Before his arrest in June 2015, Sullivan plotted with Syria-based ISIS recruiter Junaid Hussain to conduct an attack.<sup>180</sup> He agreed at Hussain’s behest to make a video of the attack that could be used by ISIS in its propaganda.<sup>181</sup> The danger that Sullivan posed is emphasized by his conviction for a murder, in which he shot and killed his neighbor.<sup>182</sup>

The conclusion that the threat to the United States is ISIS-inspired and ISIS-enabled, but not ISIS-directed, mirrors the statements of a variety of government officials. In March 2017, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats testified, “U.S.-based homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) will remain the most frequent and unpredictable Sunni violent extremist threat to the U.S. homeland.”<sup>183</sup> In May 2017, Nicholas Rasmussen, director of the National Counterterrorism Center, stated: “We certainly know that al-Qaeda and ISIS continue to aspire to carry out significant attacks on U.S. soil, but they are challenged to do so.”<sup>184</sup>

## The travel ban would not have prevented a single death from jihadist terrorists since 9/11. Nor would it have prevented the 9/11 attacks.

### The Threat in the United States Is Homegrown and Not Infiltration From Travel Ban Countries

On Jan. 27, 2017, a week after being sworn in as president, Donald Trump signed an executive order instituting a travel ban on foreign nationals from seven majority-Muslim countries: Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Libya, Yemen, and Somalia. The order also halted U.S. entry for Syrian refugees and capped the total number of refugees allowed entry in 2017 at 50,000. As a result of court challenges and international outcry, the ban was narrowed to not apply to those with close family members in the United States. Iraq was also dropped from the list of countries. The revision kept the 50,000-refugee cap in place and put a 120-day freeze on entry of any refugee starting June 29, 2017. The administration justified its travel ban by arguing, “Numerous foreign-born individuals have been convicted or implicated in terrorism-related crimes since September 11, 2001.”<sup>185</sup>

Yet, the travel ban would not have prevented a single death from jihadist terrorists since 9/11. Nor would it have prevented the 9/11 attacks, which were perpetrated by 15 Saudis, two Emiratis, an Egyptian and a Lebanese citizen — all from countries not on the travel ban list.

The threat to the United States is largely homegrown. Eighty-five percent of the 415 individuals tracked by New America and accused of jihadist terrorism-related crimes in the United States since 9/11 were either U.S. citizens or U.S. legal residents.<sup>186</sup> Just under half of them, 207, were born American citizens. Around a third were converts.

Syrian refugees settled in the United States have not posed a threat, either. No lethal act of jihadist terrorism since 9/11 has been carried out by a Syrian refugee. In fact, in New America’s dataset of 415 jihadist terrorists in the United States since 9/11, none of the 12 individuals who were refugees at the time they were charged are from Syria. Also, an ISIS terrorist with any sense is quite unlikely to try to infiltrate the United States as a Syrian refugee. Anne Richard, a senior U.S. State Department official, testified at a Senate Homeland Security Committee hearing in November 2015 that any Syrian refugee trying to get into the United States is scrutinized by officials from the National Counterterrorism Center, FBI, Department of Homeland Security, State Department, and Pentagon. Further, Leon Rodriguez, then the director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, who also testified at the November 2015 hearing, said that of the millions of people who try to get into the United States each year, “Refugees get the most scrutiny and Syrian refugees get the most scrutiny of all.”<sup>187</sup> This scrutiny can take up to two years.

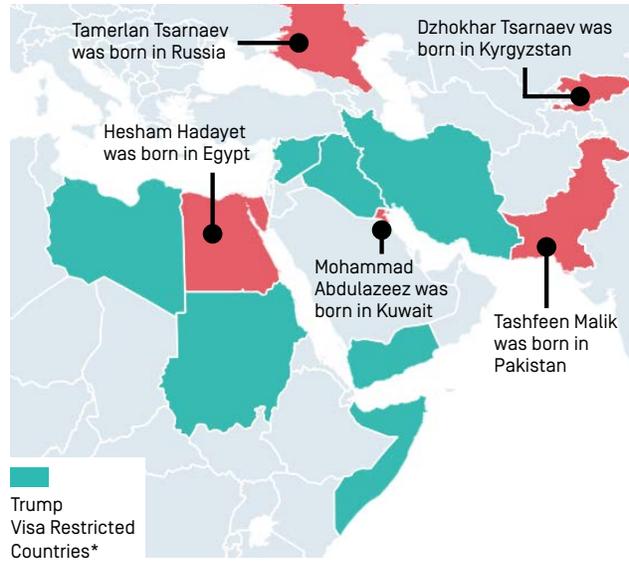
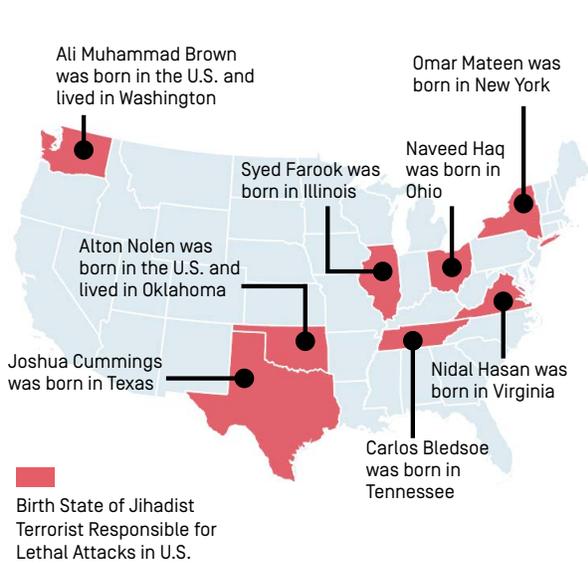
Every lethal attacker since 9/11 was either a citizen or permanent resident of the United States at the time of the attack, and none came from a country covered by the travel ban. Eight, more than half, of the 13 deadly attackers were born in the United States.<sup>188</sup> (See page 30)

Among the individuals who conducted potentially lethal attacks inside the United States that were foiled or otherwise failed to kill anyone, there are only three cases that the travel ban could have applied to. None provides a convincing argument for the travel ban. In one case, Mohammed Reza Taheri-Azar, a naturalized citizen from Iran, drove

# Origins of Lethal Jihadist Terrorist Attackers Since 9/11

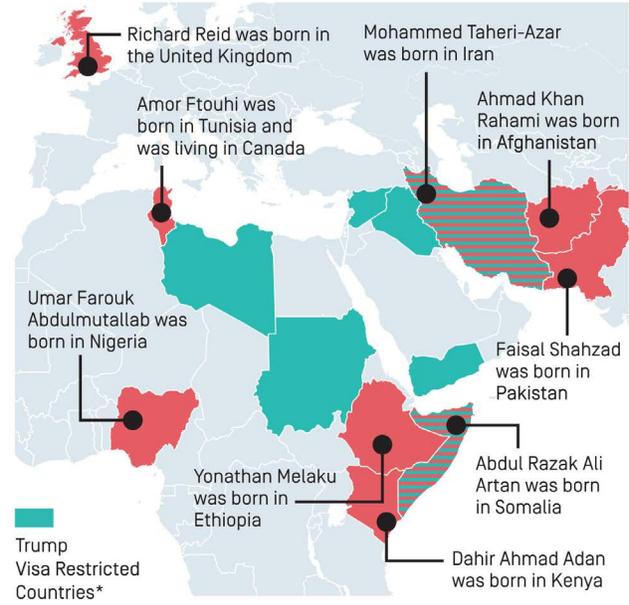
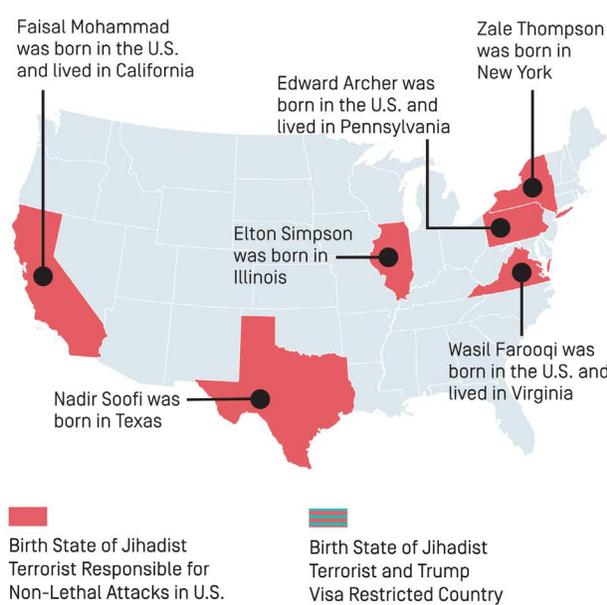
**0** Fatal Attacks in the U.S. Committed by Jihadist Terrorists from Trump Visa Restricted Countries

**13** U.S. Citizens and Legal Permanent Residents of the United States Responsible for Fatal Jihadist Attacks in U.S.



\*Note that on March 6, the Trump administration issued a new executive order, which did not include Iraq in the list of visa restricted countries.

# Origins of Non-Lethal Jihadist Terrorist Attackers Since 9/11



\*Note that on March 6, the Trump administration issued a new executive order, which did not include Iraq in the list of visa restricted countries.

a car into a group of students at the University of North Carolina in 2006, injuring nine people.<sup>189</sup> However, Taheri-Azar came to the United States at the age of two with his parents, and according to his older sister spoke no Arabic and only rudimentary Farsi.<sup>190</sup> He conducted his attack about two decades after arriving in the United States. His radicalization did not occur in Iran but in the United States.

Similarly, Dahir Adan, who committed the stabbing at a mall in Minnesota in 2016, was a naturalized citizen from Somalia, though he was born in Kenya.<sup>191</sup> Like Taheri-Azar, Adan came to the United States as a young child and his radicalization occurred in the United States, not abroad.<sup>192</sup>

Finally, there's Abdul Razak Ali Artan, a legal permanent resident who came to the United States as a refugee from Somalia in 2014, having left Somalia for Pakistan in 2007. In 2016, at age 18, he rammed a car into his fellow students on the campus of Ohio State University and proceeded to attack them with a knife, injuring 11 people. However, it is not clear that the attack provides support for the travel ban. Artan left Somalia as a pre-teen, and if he was radicalized abroad, it most likely occurred in Pakistan, which is not included in the travel ban. In a Facebook posting before his attack, Artan cited Anwar al-Awlaki, the Yemeni-American cleric born in the United States, whose writings have helped radicalize a wide range of extremists in the United States.

The Department of Homeland Security's own analysis from February 2017 undercuts the justification for the travel ban. The DHS report, which was leaked, assessed that "country of citizenship is unlikely to be a reliable indicator of potential terrorist activity" and found that half of the 82 extremists it examined were native-born American citizens. DHS determined that those who were born abroad came from 26 different countries, with no single country accounting for more than 13.5 percent of the total, and that three of the travel ban countries (Iran, Sudan and Yemen) had only one extremist who was born there, while there were no individuals from Syria.<sup>193</sup>

Another leaked DHS report from March 2017 that examined the origins of 88 foreign-born extremists assessed that "most foreign-born US-based violent extremists likely radicalized several years after their entry to the United States, limiting the ability of screening and vetting officials to prevent their entry because of national security concerns."<sup>194</sup> The report found that about half of foreign-born extremists were younger than 16 when they entered the country and the majority had lived in the United States for 10 years before their indictment or death.<sup>195</sup>

Today's extremists in the United States radicalize online, and the internet knows no visa requirements. More than four in 10 jihadists in the United States since 9/11 either maintained a social media account where they posted jihadist material or interacted with extremists via encrypted communications; in recent years, an active online presence has been almost universal among American jihadists.<sup>196</sup>

The attack in Garland, Texas, is a case in point. Not only were the perpetrators both native-born American citizens who would not have been stopped by the travel ban, but their interlocutors from ISIS did not set foot in the United States, instead encouraging the plot through online communication. The travel ban does nothing to respond to the most likely threat today: ISIS-inspired and ISIS-enabled homegrown attacks.

## **What Is the Threat to the United States From Returning Foreign Fighters?**

The threat posed by American "foreign fighters" returning to the United States is limited. To date, none of the seven foreign fighters tracked by New America who fought for ISIS or other extremist groups in Iraq and Syria has committed an act of terrorism after returning. Of those seven, only one, Abdirahman Sheik Mohamud, conspired to carry out an attack. Mohamud, a Somali-American, traveled to Syria to join the Nusra Front in April 2014, only three months after he became a

naturalized citizen. He returned to the United States that June and shortly thereafter communicated with an unnamed individual about his desire to travel to a military base in Texas and kill three or four U.S. soldiers.<sup>197</sup> Mohamud was arrested in February 2015 — before attempting to carry out this plot — and pleaded guilty to material support charges in June 2017.

The threat from returning foreign fighters should of course be an area of focus for U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials and those in the intelligence and law enforcement communities tasked with protecting the homeland. How this threat manifests, however, has shifted. As National Counterterrorism Center Director Nicholas Rasmussen noted in July 2017, “I look at the problem now as not so much as one of quantity but as one of quality,” emphasizing not the number of returnees but the skills that the small number of those who might return have obtained and how they might use them.<sup>198</sup> “Many, if not most of the foreign fighters who made their way to the conflict zone will end up fighting, staying fighting and potentially dying in order to maintain the caliphate,” Rasmussen stated.<sup>199</sup>

## Jihadists Are Not the Only Threat in the United States

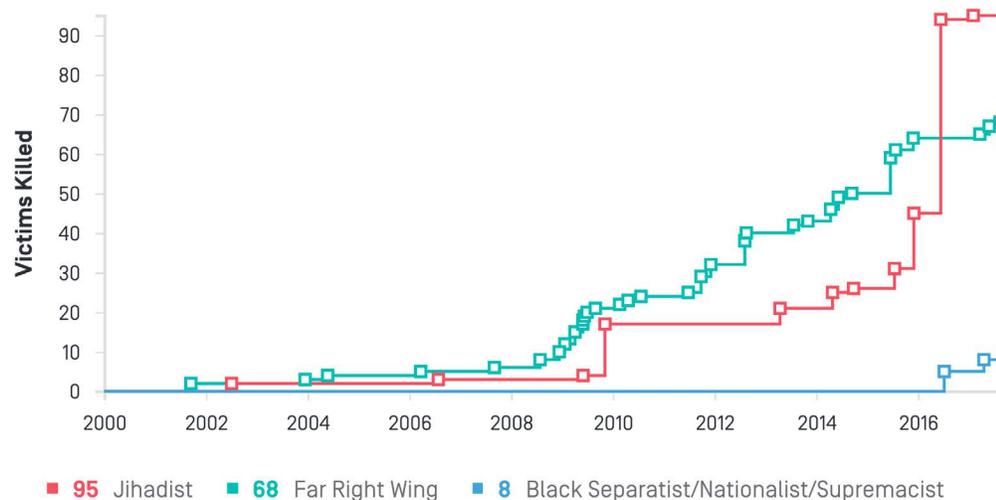
The terrorist threat in the United States does not emanate only from individuals motivated by jihadist ideology. The broader challenge is from individuals who plan and commit political violence motivated by a range of ideologies, including far-right, black-nationalist, and left-wing causes, as well as idiosyncratic notions.

New America has found that since 9/11, individuals motivated by far-right ideology have killed 68 people in the United States, while individuals motivated by black-nationalist or separatist ideology have killed eight people.<sup>200</sup>

Since Donald Trump assumed the presidency, the United States has seen one deadly jihadist attack, the shooting committed by Joshua Cummings in January. There have also been three lethal far-right-wing attacks.

- On March 20, 2017, James Harris Jackson killed an African-American man with a sword in New York City after traveling from Baltimore for that

**Figure 5 | Deadly Attacks by Ideology and Year**



purpose.<sup>201</sup> Jackson was indicted on a rare state terrorism charge.<sup>202</sup> Jackson had liked Alt-Right YouTube videos and written an anti-black manifesto before his attack.<sup>203</sup>

- On May 26, 2017, Jeremy Christian, a 35-year-old active in violent right-wing “free speech” protests in Portland, Oregon, stabbed and killed two men who intervened when he was harassing two Muslim women on public transit.<sup>204</sup> During a court hearing, Christian declared, “Death to the enemies of America. Death to antifa [anti-fascists]. You call it terrorism. I call it patriotism. Die.”<sup>205</sup>
- On Aug. 12, 2017, James Alex Fields Jr., a 20-year-old from Maumee, Ohio, rammed his car into a group of people in Charlottesville, Virginia, who were gathered to protest a white nationalist rally, killing a 32-year-old woman and injuring 19 others.

The United States has also seen one deadly attack by an individual motivated by black-nationalist ideology since Trump assumed office.<sup>206</sup> On April 18, 2017, Kori Ali Muhammad, a 39-year-old African-American man, was arrested and charged with killing three people in a shooting in Fresno, California.<sup>207</sup> Police said race was a factor in the murders and Muhammad’s social media presence included black-nationalist posts. Muhammad’s father said his son believed he was part of a war between whites and blacks and that “a battle was about to take place.”<sup>208</sup>

The attack by 66-year-old James T. Hodgkinson III on Republican congressmen during a June 2017 baseball practice in Alexandria, Virginia, which did not kill anyone, suggests that political violence could again be emerging on the left.<sup>209</sup> And the United States has also seen violence by individuals who are motivated not by a formal political ideology but rather in response to the broader polarization and conspiracy theorizing affecting American political discourse.<sup>210</sup> In December 2016, a man shot a weapon inside a pizzeria in Washington, D.C., because he believed a conspiracy theory that the pizza joint was in fact a secret front for a child sex ring run by senior Democratic Party officials. Fortunately, nobody was hurt in that attack.

# WHO ARE ISIS' AMERICAN RECRUITS?

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The Syrian civil war and ISIS' declaration of a caliphate produced a massive flow of "foreign fighters" to Iraq and Syria — a total of roughly 40,000 over the course of the conflict, according to Brett McGurk, the U.S. special envoy to the anti-ISIS coalition.<sup>211</sup> While the vast majority of these fighters came from the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and the former Soviet republics, the United States was the source of a small number of ISIS recruits.

The Americans drawn to the Syrian jihad — 250 have tried or have succeeded in getting to Syria, according to former FBI Director James Comey — have much in common with other Western "foreign fighters" recruited by ISIS.<sup>212</sup> Among these militants, women are well-represented, volunteers are young, and they are active online.

New America has identified 129 individuals who are reported in public records or news accounts as having tried to join militant groups in Syria such as ISIS or the Nusra Front, succeeded in joining such groups, or provided support to others who joined or attempted to join these groups.

Of the 129, 16 are dead, 20 remain at large (outside the United States), 92 are in custody in the United States, and one has been released. Only about a third, 44 individuals, ever actually joined a militant

group in Syria. The rest were arrested for attempting to travel to fight abroad or for supporting others attempting to do so.

The 129 American ISIS recruits came from 25 states: Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

The average age of Americans drawn to militant groups in Syria and Iraq was 26, and nearly one in five were teenagers, the youngest of whom was 15.

An unprecedented number of American women have been involved in the Syrian jihad compared to other such jihads in the past. One in eight of the 129 Americans involved in Syria-related militant activity are women. Women were rarely present, if at all, among jihadists in previous "holy wars" — in Afghanistan against the Soviets in the 1980s, in Bosnia against the Serbs in the 1990s, and in the initial insurgency in Iraq against the U.S.-led occupation more than a decade ago.<sup>213</sup>

There is no single ethnic profile for these militants: They are white, African-American,

Somali-American, Vietnamese-American, Bosnian-American, and Arab-American, among other ethnicities and nationalities.

The key characteristic that ties together American militants drawn to the Syrian conflict is that they are active in online jihadist circles. Of the 129 individuals, 101 showed a pattern of often downloading and sharing jihadist propaganda online and, in a smaller number of cases, engaging in online conversations with militants abroad. Militants in the United States today become radicalized after reading and interacting with propaganda online and have little or no physical interaction with other extremists. In the useful formulation of Israeli counterterrorism expert Gabriel Weimann, the lone wolf is now part of a virtual pack.

Social media has dramatically accelerated this trend. Of the 129 individual cases that New America examined, there were no clear cases of physical recruitment by a militant operative, radical cleric, or returning fighter from Syria. Instead, people radicalized online or were sometimes in touch via Twitter or other encrypted-messaging platforms with members of ISIS they had never met in person.

A representative case is that of 19-year-old Mohammed Hamzah Khan of suburban Chicago. In the late summer of 2014, he purchased three airline tickets for flights from Chicago to Istanbul for himself, his 17-year-old sister and 16-year-old

brother (who have not been named publicly because they were minors).

Khan had met someone online who had provided him with the number of a contact to call once he had landed in Istanbul who would help to get him and his siblings to the Syrian border, and from there on to a region occupied by ISIS. Khan planned to serve in the group's police force. Before leaving, Khan wrote a three-page letter to his parents explaining why he was leaving Chicago to join ISIS. He told them that ISIS had established the perfect Islamic state and that he felt obligated to "migrate" there.<sup>214</sup>

According to prosecutors, the three teenagers planned to meet up in Turkey with a shadowy ISIS recruiter they had met online, known as Abu Qa'qa, and travel with him, most likely to ISIS headquarters in Raqqa, Syria.<sup>215</sup> They didn't make it. FBI agents arrested Khan and his two siblings at O'Hare Airport in October 2014.<sup>216</sup>

There is no evidence that Khan planned to commit any act of terrorism in the United States or elsewhere, and he failed in his goal of reaching ISIS, but he faced up to 15 years in prison for attempting to provide "material support" to ISIS in the form of his own potential "services." He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 40 months in prison and 20 years of supervised release, during which he must continue to cooperate with law enforcement authorities.<sup>217</sup>

**The key characteristic that ties together American militants drawn to the Syrian conflict is that they are active in online jihadist circles.**

# WHAT IS THE THREAT TO EUROPE?

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While the threat in the United States consists of attacks inspired — or in some cases enabled — by ISIS, the threat in Europe is more severe, consisting of a mixture of attacks directed by ISIS and its affiliates as well as homegrown ISIS-enabled and ISIS-inspired attacks.

While the United States has experienced no attacks directed by foreign terrorist organizations since 9/11, there have been five ISIS-directed attacks in Europe since 2014:

- The November 2015 attacks in Paris, which killed 130 people, by terrorists trained in Syria and sent back to Europe by ISIS. The Paris attacks showed how a group of terrorists trained by a terrorist organization can mount operations more lethal than those carried out by homegrown terrorists without such training.
- The March 2016 bombing of the Brussels airport and metro, killing 32 people, by members of the same cell.

- An August 2015 foiled attack on a train in Oignies, France, whose perpetrator, Ayoub El-Khazzani, traveled to Europe with Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the mastermind of the Paris attacks.<sup>218</sup>
- In May 2014, Mehdi Nemmouche killed four people in a shooting at the Jewish Museum of Belgium in Brussels. Nemmouche had been in contact with Abaaoud and had guarded Western hostages held by ISIS Core in Syria.<sup>219</sup>
- In May 2017, Salman Abedi killed 22 people when he bombed an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England. He had trained and been in close contact with ISIS operations planners in Libya. This was in addition to the four attacks directed by ISIS core in Syria.

The five ISIS-directed attacks in Europe since 2014 killed 188 people, around two times the death toll of all deadly jihadist attacks in the United States since 9/11.

Europe also experienced seven ISIS-enabled attacks since 2014,<sup>h</sup> compared to one in the United States.

<sup>h</sup> Those attacks are: the April 2017 Stockholm, Sweden, truck attack that killed five people and injured 14; the December 2016 Berlin, Germany, Christmas market attack that killed 12 and wounded 56; the July 2016 music festival suicide attack in Ansbach, Germany, that injured 12 people; the July 2016 ax attack on a train in Würzburg, Germany, that injured four; the July 2016 killing of two people in Magnanville, France; the stabbing attack in February 2016 of a police officer by a 16-year-old girl in Hanover, Germany, that injured one; and the April 2015 church attack in Villejuif, France, that killed one.

Twenty people have died in ISIS-enabled attacks in Europe, while no one has died in an ISIS-enabled attack in the United States.

Finally, there have been 37 attacks inspired by jihadist ideology that have not been directed or enabled by ISIS or other foreign terrorist organizations. These inspired attacks have killed 128 people in Europe since 2014, more than jihadist terrorists have killed in the United States during the 16 years since the 9/11 attacks.<sup>i</sup>

The threat in Europe is compounded by the much larger numbers of foreign fighters who departed Europe to join militant groups in Syria. In 2016, the Paris-based Center for the Analysis of Terrorism estimated that since 2013, 7,000 Europeans had left to fight for terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria.<sup>220</sup> However, by 2017 the foreign fighter flow from Europe to Syria and Iraq had been largely stanching. Europol's 2017 report assessed, "There is a decrease in the numbers of individuals travelling to the conflict zones in Syria/ Iraq to join the jihadist terrorist groups as foreign terrorist fighters."<sup>221</sup> In May 2017, Director Nicholas Rasmussen of the U.S.

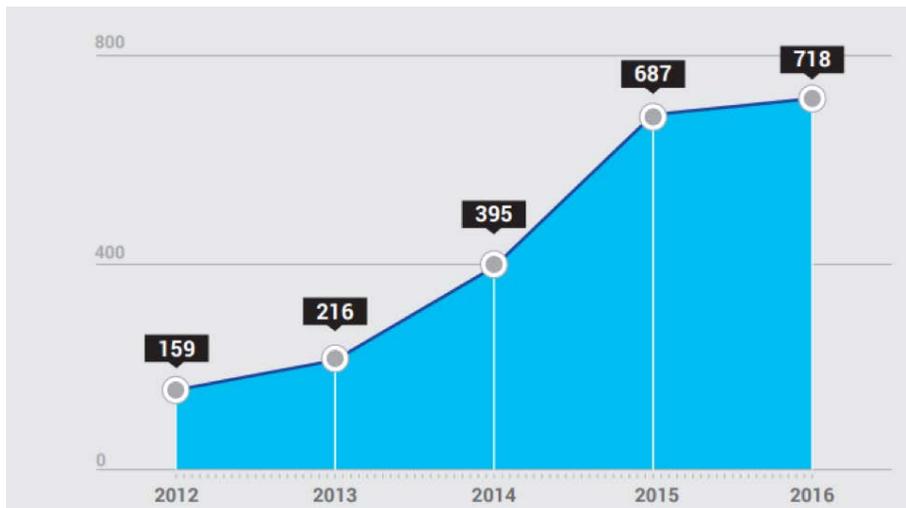
National Counterterrorism Center commented, "The good news is that we know that the rate of foreign fighters traveling has steadily declined since its peak in 2014."<sup>222</sup>

This shift was becoming clear by early 2016, when the Pentagon reported a 90 percent drop in the foreign fighter flow.<sup>223</sup> The 2017 Europol assessment reported: "Arrests for travelling to conflict zones for terrorist purposes also decreased: from 141 in 2015 to 77 in 2016. This was similar to the decrease in numbers of arrests of people returning from the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq: from 41 in 2015 to 22 in 2016."<sup>224</sup> Numerous efforts, including expanded policing and Turkey's clampdown on its border, made travel far more difficult.<sup>225</sup>

As of August 2017, French authorities say, 271 militants have returned to France from training in Syria and Iraq.<sup>226</sup> The large number from Europe who went to fight in Iraq and Syria — some of whom are now returning — differentiates the threat Europe faces from that faced by the United States. Based on a review of the public record, New America has found only seven militants who have returned to the

<sup>i</sup> These attacks are: the August 2017 knife attack on Belgian soldiers in Brussels that injured one person; the August 2017 Buckingham Palace knife attack on police in London that injured three people; the August 2017 vehicle attack in Barcelona, Spain, that killed 16 people; the August 2017 vehicle attack on French soldiers in Paris that injured six; the July 2017 knife attack at a supermarket in Hamburg, Germany, that killed one person; the June 2017 botched bombing of the Brussels Central Station that failed to kill or injure anyone; the June 2017 car ramming attack on the Champs-Élysées in Paris that failed to kill or injure anyone; the June 2017 hammer attack at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris that injured one person; the June 2017 attack on London Bridge that killed eight people; the May 2017 stabbing attack at the Milan, Italy, train station that injured three people; the April 2017 shooting on the Champs-Élysées in Paris that killed one person; the March 2017 attack near London's Westminster Palace that killed five people; the March 2017 attack at Paris' Orly Airport that injured two people; the February 2017 machete attack at the Louvre in Paris that injured one person; the October 2016 stabbing attack in Mülheim, Germany, that resulted in no injuries; the October 2016 stabbing attack in Brussels that injured two people; the September 2016 attack in Rimini, Italy, that injured one person; the August 2016 machete attack in Charleroi, Belgium, that injured two people; the July 2016 hostage incident at a church in Normandy, France, in which one person was killed; the July 2016 truck ramming attack at Bastille Day celebrations in Nice, France, that killed 86 people; the May 2016 stabbing in Saint Julien du Puy, France, in which one person was injured; the April 2016 bomb attack at a Sikh temple in Essen, Germany, that injured three people; the February 2016 bludgeoning of an imam in Manchester, England, in which one person was killed; the February 2016 Molotov cocktail attack in Hannover, Germany, in which two people were injured; the January 2016 attack on a Jewish teacher in Marseilles, France, in which one person was injured; the

**Figure 6 |** Number of Suspects Arrested for Religiously Inspired/Jihadist Terrorism 2012 to 2016



**Source:** European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2017 (Europol: The Hague, The Netherlands, June 2017). <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/2017-eu-terrorism-report-142-failed-foiled-and-completed-attacks-1002-arrests-and-142-victims-died>

United States after joining jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq; six are in prison and one is out of prison.<sup>i</sup>

The threat in Europe is further compounded by the existence there of stronger, more developed jihadist networks than exist in the United States. One reason ISIS was able to successfully conduct the November 2015 Paris attacks was that the nine attackers relied on a support network of at least 20 other people.<sup>227</sup> Similarly, Belgium tried 46 members

of Sharia4Belgium who traveled to fight in Syria or helped others to do so.<sup>228</sup> Those 46 are only a small portion of the larger Sharia4Belgium network.

According to Europol, European states arrested 718 people for jihadist terrorism in 2016, an increase from 2015.<sup>229</sup> That is more jihadist terrorism-related arrests than have been made in the United States since 9/11.<sup>230</sup>

January 2016 knife attack at a Paris police station in which no one was killed or injured; the January 2016 car ramming attack in Valence, France, in which no one was killed or injured; the December 2015 shooting attack at the Underground station in Leytonstone, England, that injured three people; the November 2015 stabbing of a Jewish teacher in Marseilles, France, that injured one person; the September 2015 stabbing of a police officer in Berlin, Germany, that injured one person; the June 2015 beheading attack in Saint-Quentin-Fallavier, France, in which one person was killed; the February 2015 shootings in Copenhagen, Denmark, in which two people were killed; the February 2015 stabbing attack at a Jewish center in Nice, France, that injured two people; the January 2015 attack in Paris by Amedy Coulibaly (that occurred simultaneously with the attack on the Charlie Hebdo magazine) that killed five people; the December 2014 vehicle ramming attack in Dijon, France, that injured 11 people; the December 2014 stabbing attack in Joué-lès-Tours, France, that injured three people; and the October 2014 murder of a mother by her teenage daughter in Kvissel, Denmark.

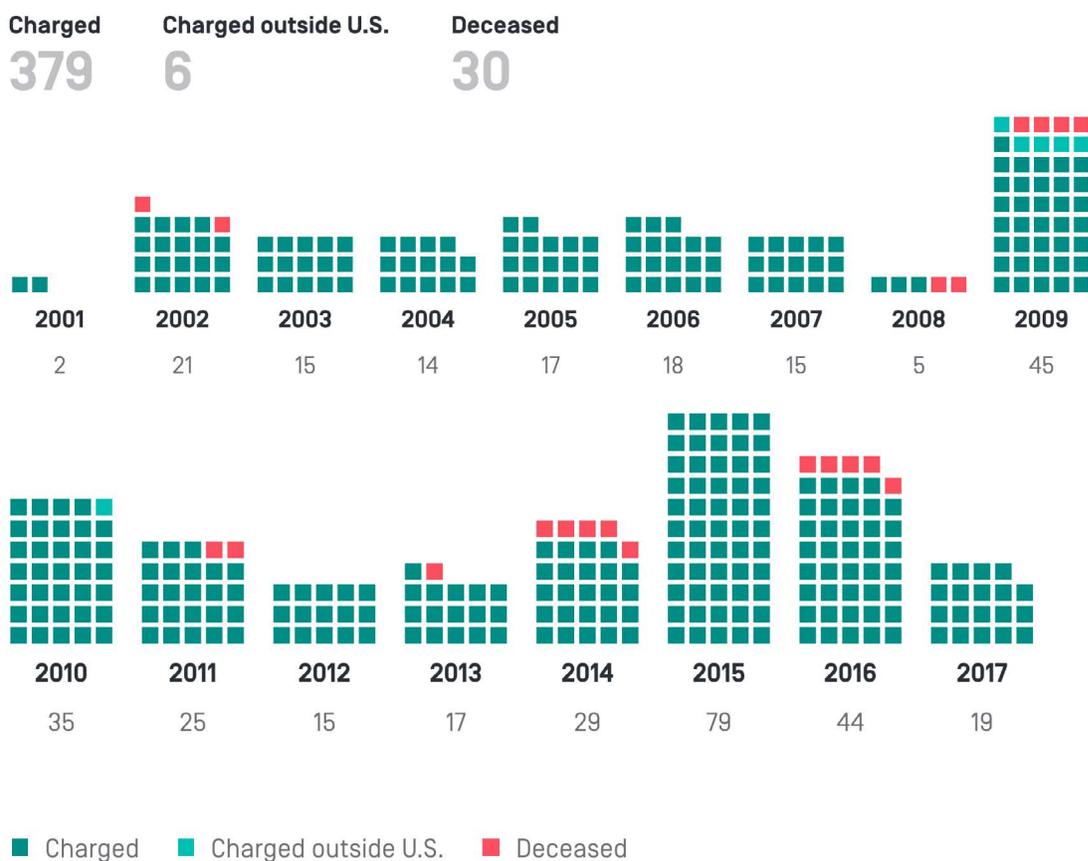
<sup>i</sup> Then-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper stated in March 2015 that 40 Americans had returned from Syria. This figure included fighters with non-jihadist groups as well as aid workers, in addition to those who had fought with al-Qaeda or ISIS in Syria.

While the number of European terrorism cases continued to grow, albeit at a slower rate in 2016, yearly terrorism cases in the United States peaked in 2015 and have declined since then.

Europe will likely continue to struggle with a significant homegrown threat rooted in the difficulties it faces in successfully integrating its Muslim population. In particular, the lack of opportunities and the identity challenges facing second-generation Muslim immigrants in Europe will likely continue to radicalize some for the foreseeable future.<sup>231</sup> While ISIS' state may have fallen, the group's brand may survive, buoyed by nostalgia, as terrorism researcher Thomas Hegghammer has argued.<sup>232</sup>

Those challenges will likely be exacerbated by anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant feeling in Europe, which in some cases is also being expressed through terrorism. On June 19, 2017, a 48-year-old man killed one person and injured 10 others in a vehicle ramming near a mosque in north London targeting Muslims during Ramadan.<sup>233</sup> In July, Sweden sentenced three neo-Nazis for bombing asylum centers in the country; the perpetrators had received paramilitary training in Russia, according to the court.<sup>234</sup> In 2017, Germany reported a surge in far-right violent crimes.<sup>235</sup> While this far-right violence poses a significant threat on its own, it should also raise concerns about the potential for homegrown cycles of violence driven by polarization in European politics.

**Figure 7 | U.S. Terrorism-Related Cases by Year**



# THE DRIVERS OF GLOBAL JIHADISM

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At the macro level, ISIS is not itself the problem — though it certainly amplifies existing problems — but rather is the symptom of nine major problems and trends that are driving jihadist terrorism around the globe and that will continue to do so even when ISIS is largely defeated.<sup>236</sup>

- 1. The regional civil war in the Middle East between Sunni and Shia.** The sectarian regional civil war is being driven by a variety of factors, including the failure of the largely Shia Iraqi government to give Sunnis a real place at the table and the brutal civil war that the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad is waging on his largely Sunni population. Also in the mix is the role that Iran and the Gulf states have played in fighting each other in Syria through proxy forces such as the Sunni militant groups supported by the Gulf states and the Shia militias supported by Iran.

This regional sectarian war was amplified by Saudi Arabia's invasion of Yemen in the spring of 2015 to fight Iranian-backed Houthis who had recently seized control of the Yemeni capital.

The civil war across the Middle East between the Shia and the Sunni empowers groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda who claim to be the defenders of Sunni rights against Shia attack. Until there is real political accommodation

between Sunnis and Shia in countries such as Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and some kind of rapprochement between the mortal enemies Iran and Saudi Arabia, these sectarian wars will grind on. Don't, however, expect such an accommodation in the short or medium term. The Syrian civil war is already in its entering its seventh year and the principal players in the conflict both inside Syria and outside of the country show no sign of setting up a real peace process.

- 2. The collapse of Arab governance around the region.** ISIS is many ways a symptom of the broader failure of governance in the Arab world. Generally, the weaker a Muslim state, the stronger the presence of ISIS or like-minded groups will be. So, in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen — countries that are completely failed states or are largely failing states — the presence of these groups is strong. In Muslim countries with somewhat competent governments such as Indonesia, the presence of these groups is relatively small.
- 3. The collapse of economies in war-torn Muslim states.** The conflicts in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen have left their economies in bad shape. This, coupled with the stubbornly low price of oil, leaves oil-dependent Arab governments strapped for

cash and unable to deliver services on which their citizens depend. The ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2017 notes, "After the 2014 oil price decline, the only GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] country that is projected to get back to non-oil GDP growth levels similar to the 2006-2015 period is the UAE."<sup>237</sup> In August 2016, the *Economist* wrote: "On the eve of the Arab uprisings, total and youth unemployment rates in the Arab world were already the highest of any region, at 10 percent and 27 percent respectively. Since then these figures have risen further, to nearly 12 percent and 30 percent."<sup>238</sup>

**4. The population bulge in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).** The MENA region has, according to a 2015 report from the *Economist*, the second fastest-growing population of any region except for sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>239</sup>

**5. The tidal wave of Muslim immigration into Europe.** As a result of the four problems and trends outlined above, there has been an unprecedented wave of immigration from Muslim-majority countries into Europe in the past three years. Germany alone has taken more than a million refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>240</sup> European countries simply do not have the ideological framework the United States has in the shape of the "American Dream," which has helped to successfully absorb wave after wave of immigration, including Muslim Americans who are generally well integrated into American society. There is no analogous French Dream or German Dream.

**6. The marginalization of Muslims in Europe.** Jihadism in Europe draws not only upon motivations tied to overseas wars such as in Syria, but also from the discrimination and poor economic and social conditions faced by many European Muslims. The proportion of the French prison population that is Muslim is estimated to be around 60 percent, yet Muslims account for only about 8 percent of France's total population.<sup>241</sup> Muslim citizens in France are 2.5 times less likely to be called

for a job interview than a similar Christian candidate, according to researchers at Stanford University.<sup>242</sup> Many French Muslims live in grim banlieues, the suburbs of large French cities (similar to housing projects in the United States), where they find themselves largely divorced from mainstream French society. According to the Renseignements Généraux, a police agency that monitors militants in France, half the neighborhoods with a high Muslim population are isolated from French social and political life. The French term for these neighborhoods is equivalent to "sensitive urban zones," where youth unemployment can be as high as 45 percent.<sup>243</sup>

In Belgium there is a similar story: Thirty percent of the prison population is Muslim, yet Muslims make up only 6 percent of the overall population.<sup>244</sup>

It is not surprising that many of the perpetrators of attacks in Europe come from these economically marginalized communities or have spent time in French and Belgian prisons, which can function as universities of jihad. The members of the ISIS cell responsible for the November 2015 attacks in Paris that killed 130 and the March 2016 attacks in Brussels that killed 32 had bonded through criminal activities or in prison.<sup>245</sup> Abdelhamid Abaaoud and Salah Abdeslam, the cell's masterminds, were childhood friends who grew up in the impoverished Brussels neighborhood of Molenbeek. In 2010, the men were arrested and spent time in the same prison. Ibrahim Abdeslam, Salah's brother, also spent time in prison with Abaaoud.<sup>246</sup> He would go on to be one of the terrorists in the Paris attacks. Khalid and Ibrahim El Bakraoui, both suicide bombers in the Brussels attacks, had served lengthy prison sentences for armed robbery and assault on police.<sup>247</sup>

**7. The rise of European ultranationalist parties.** This is a trend amplified by the large waves of immigration from Muslim countries into

Europe. These parties define themselves as deeply opposed to immigrants and are ultranationalist in flavor. They once played a marginal role in European politics but are now doing well in Austria, France, Hungary, Poland, Switzerland and the Netherlands. The rise of these parties reflects the anti-immigrant sentiment in many European societies that in turn intensifies the feelings of alienation among many Muslims in Europe.

In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders leads the anti-Muslim Party for Freedom, which as of the 2017 election holds the second-most seats in the Dutch House of Representatives. During the 2017 campaign, Wilders ran on a deeply nationalist platform and was unabashed in his criticism of Islam, at one time saying, “Dutch values are based on Christianity, on Judaism, on humanism. Islam and freedom are not compatible.”<sup>248</sup> He had at different points referred to Moroccan immigrants as “scum,” and called for mosques and the Koran to be disallowed in the Netherlands.<sup>249</sup>

#### **8. The global spread of militant Salafism.**

Salafism is an ultrafundamentalist branch of Sunni Islam that is intolerant of Shia Islam and other religions. While very few Salafists are terrorists, jihadist terrorists are almost invariably Salafists.<sup>250</sup> Saudi Arabia has long been the world’s preeminent advocate of Salafism, but the ideology has also manifested itself in Western countries. In Germany, for example, Hans-Georg Maaßen, the president of the intelligence agency known as the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, said in September 2016 that there were 9,200 Salafists in Germany. This was up from 8,900 in June 2016 and from 5,500 in 2013.<sup>251</sup>

#### **9. The amplification of anger by social media.**

All of the problems and trends mentioned above are amplified and fueled by social media.

Given the fact that the trends and issues are not going away anytime soon, we are likely to see a son of ISIS and even a grandson of ISIS emerging in the future.

# EMERGING TRENDS IN TERRORISM

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## 1. TATP: The Hydrogen Peroxide-Based Bomb of Choice<sup>252</sup>

Since 2014, there have been 12 attacks in the West involving explosives.<sup>k</sup> Of those, five used TATP, triacetone triperoxide, an explosive that has long been the bomb of choice for jihadists in the West due to the ease of acquiring the components to make it, as compared to military-grade explosives. It can be built using the common household ingredient hydrogen peroxide, which is used to bleach hair.

Yet making a TATP bomb is tricky because the ingredients are highly unstable and can explode if improperly handled. The danger of building TATP bombs without training can be seen in the case of Matthew Rugo and Curtis Jetton, 21-year-old roommates in Texas City, Texas.<sup>253</sup> They didn't have any bomb-making training and were manufacturing explosives in 2006 from concentrated bleach when

their concoction blew up, killing Rugo and injuring Jetton. The pair had no political motives: They had just wanted to blow up vehicles for fun.

TATP therefore often indicates that a perpetrator received training or direction from a foreign terrorist group. Indeed, three of the five attacks involving TATP since 2014 — the 2015 Paris bombings, the 2016 bombings of the Brussels metro and airport by the same ISIS cell, and the 2017 bombing of an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England — were directed by ISIS. In contrast, the two other attacks since 2014 involving TATP — a June 2017 failed bombing of the Brussels metro that killed only the perpetrator and the August 2017 attacks in Barcelona where traces of TATP were found at a suspected bomb factory tied to the plot — had no known operational link to ISIS.<sup>254</sup>

Five ISIS-inspired attacks and one ISIS-enabled attack in the West since 2014 used other explosives.

<sup>k</sup> These are: the August 2017 Barcelona, Spain attack [TATP]; the June 2017 Brussels, Belgium Central Station botched bomb plot [TATP]; the June 2017 Champs-Élysées car-ramming attack in Paris, France; the May 2017 Manchester, UK Ariana Grande concert bombing [TATP]; the September 2016 New York/New Jersey pressure-cooker bombings; the August 2016 Ontario, Canada taxi cab suicide-bombing attempt; the July 2016 music festival suicide-bombing attack in Ansbach, Germany; the April 2016 Sikh temple bombing in Essen, Germany; the March 2016 Brussels, Belgium airport bombings [TATP]; the December 2015 San Bernardino, California office shooting; the November 2015 Paris, France attacks [TATP]; and the January 2015 attacks around Paris, France by Amedy Coulibaly in connection to Charlie Hebdo attacks.

For example, Tashfeen Malik and Syed Rizwan Farook, who killed 14 people in San Bernardino, California, had built pipe bombs using Christmas lights and smokeless powder.<sup>255</sup> The bomb recipe they used was learned from *Inspire*, the English-language propaganda magazine of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, whose article “Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom” was also used by the Boston Marathon bombers.<sup>256</sup>

## 2. The Rise of Vehicular Attacks<sup>257</sup>

Since 2014, there have been 13 vehicle-ramming attacks in the West conducted by jihadists, which have killed a total of 134 people.<sup>1</sup> On Aug. 17, 2017, a van rammed into a group of tourists and others on a crowded street in Barcelona and killed 16 people. ISIS claimed that the attack was carried out by “soldiers of the caliphate” — a formulation it had used to describe the Orlando terrorist Omar Mateen, who was inspired by ISIS.

In April 2017, Rakhmat Akilov rammed a truck into a crowd in Stockholm, killing five people. On Dec. 19, 2016, Anis Amri hijacked a truck and drove it through a crowded Berlin Christmas market, killing 12 people.

On July 14, 2016, Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel drove a truck through a crowd gathered in the French city of Nice to celebrate Bastille Day. Bouhlel’s attack, which lacked operational direction from ISIS, killed 86 people.

None of the vehicular rammings were directed by ISIS, demonstrating the lack of training or specialization required to conduct such an attack. This has made vehicular attacks particularly appealing to ISIS. In September 2014, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the ISIS spokesman, called upon people in the West to conduct attacks with whatever means they had — specifically mentioning vehicular attacks.<sup>258</sup>

Vehicular attacks are not new. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula called for such attacks in 2010, in *Inspire* magazine. In 2006, Mohammed Taheri-Azar injured nine people when he drove an SUV into people on the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill campus, and Palestinian militants have made frequent use of the tactic.

However, the recent wave of vehicular attacks has demonstrated the potential of this tactic for empowering individuals to kill large numbers of people with little preparation. It has also begun to be adopted by individuals in the West motivated by ideologies other than jihadism. In June 2017, a man killed one person and injured 11 when he rammed a vehicle into a group of Muslims outside a mosque in north London; the man allegedly shouted, “I want to kill all Muslims — I did my bit.” And, as noted above, a right-wing extremist killed a woman in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017 when he rammed a car into a group of people protesting a white nationalist rally.<sup>259</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These attacks include the August 2017 attack in Barcelona, Spain, that killed 16 people; the vehicle attack on French soldiers in Paris in August 2017 that injured six; the June 2017 attack in Paris on the Champs-Élysées that resulted in no injuries or deaths; the June 2017 attack on London Bridge that killed eight people; the April 2017 attack in Stockholm, Sweden, that killed five people; the March 2017 attack on London’s Westminster Bridge that killed five people; the December 2016 attack at a Christmas market in Berlin, Germany, that killed 12 people; the November 2016 attack at Ohio State University that injured 11 people; the July 2016 attack on Bastille Day celebrations in Nice, France, that killed 86 people; the January 2016 attack in Valence, France, that injured two people; the June 2015 attack in Saint-Quentin-Fallavier, France, that killed one person; the December 2014 attack in Dijon, France, that injured 11 people; and the October 2014 attack in Quebec, Canada, that killed one person. Omitted from this count due to not being conducted by jihadists are the August 2017 Charlottesville, Virginia, vehicle-ramming attack that killed one and the June 2017 Finsbury Park Mosque vehicle-ramming attack in London that killed one.

### 3. The Use of Armed Drones by Terrorist Groups

In January 2017, ISIS announced in its newsletter *al-Naba'* the establishment of the “Unmanned Aircraft of the Mujahideen,” an operational unit organized to engineer and deploy drones in combat.<sup>260</sup> The terror network has been experimenting with drone technology since at least 2015, when Kurdish fighters in Syria shot down two small commercial drones reportedly belonging to the group — both of which were armed with explosives.<sup>261</sup>

Eric Schmitt of the *New York Times* reported that over the course of December 2016 and January 2017, ISIS deployed more than 80 drones in combat in Iraq.<sup>262</sup> A batch of ISIS documents about the group’s drones was obtained and handed over to American analysts in January 2017 by Vera Mironova, a Belfer Center fellow at Harvard embedded with Iraqi troops. The papers described the bureaucracy of the program, which falls under the al-Bara’ bin Malik Brigade. An analysis of the documents by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point found that foreign fighters have a role in ISIS’s drone operations.<sup>263</sup>

Other militant groups have demonstrated drone capability as well. Hezbollah and Hamas were early adopters of drone technology. In 2004, Hezbollah flew a military-grade drone, reportedly acquired from Iran, over Israeli airspace.<sup>264</sup> The Lebanese militant group also conducted strikes in Syria in 2014 with an armed drone and in 2016 with over-the-counter drones armed with small explosives.<sup>265</sup>

Iran also appears to be supplying Houthi insurgents in Yemen with drones. On Jan. 30, 2017, a maritime drone operated by the Houthis crashed into a Saudi ship in the Red Sea, killing two Saudi sailors. Vice Adm. Kevin Donegan, commander of the U.S. Navy 5th Fleet, described the drone to *Defense News* as a “remote-controlled boat of some kind” that was loaded with explosives.<sup>266</sup>

In the past two years, ISIS has fashioned over-the-counter drones into kamikaze drones — armed with

a small munition that detonates on impact — while engineering store-bought devices into drones that can release a small bomb.

Though they are not a “game changer,” according to Air Force Col. John L. Dorrian, a U.S. military spokesman, ISIS’ drones have succeeded in producing battlefield casualties, particularly among Iraqi soldiers and citizens; this has pushed the U.S. military to take countermeasures like using electronic jamming and other technology to keep ISIS’ rigged hobby drones from populating the skies.<sup>267</sup>

Despite U.S. military efforts, the ISIS drone program continues to evolve, as demonstrated by photographs of an ISIS drone factory. Taken by Iraqi soldiers and published in June 2017, the pictures showed drones built entirely from scratch using metal pipes, wooden propellers and repurposed engines from motorcycles.<sup>268</sup>

U.S.-led coalition fighters continue to target ISIS drone factories and experts. According to Iraqi media, airstrikes in April 2017 attacked a drone warehouse in western Mosul belonging to the group.<sup>269</sup> Iraqi media also reported that another such warehouse, in Tal Afar, west of Mosul, was targeted in a strike on June 27, 2017, killing a militant, Abu Hafsa, who reportedly headed the group’s drone operations.<sup>270</sup>

ISIS’ unmanned systems present a low-level but persistent threat to the U.S. and its allies. The threat posed could create greater disruption, however, should ISIS fighters begin arming their drones with chemical weapons and directing them against civilian populations.<sup>271</sup>

On Aug. 14, 2017, a drone hobbyist posted video footage recorded from his DJI Phantom drone, a popular consumer brand, flying close to the HMS Queen Elizabeth.<sup>272</sup> The freshly minted warship, which was docked in Scotland, is the United Kingdom’s largest aircraft carrier. Following the flyover, the drone enthusiast landed his remote-controlled plane on the carrier without detection,

demonstrating how a tech-savvy group such as ISIS could potentially exploit gaps in security around significant military targets.

#### 4. The Threat to Airports and Aviation

Jihadist terrorists continue to target airports and aviation. Three main threats to this sector deserve focus: attacks against aircraft involving explosives or other weapons taken past security; insider threats at airports that can allow terrorists to bypass security efforts; and attacks on unsecured parts of the airport.

John Kelly, previously secretary of homeland security and now White House chief of staff, made airline and airport security a primary area of focus during his short tenure as secretary. In March 2017, the Department of Homeland Security imposed a ban on laptops, tablets, and other devices larger than a mobile phone carried by passengers on flights coming from 10 Muslim-majority countries. The ban was imposed due to what was believed to be an imminent threat from ISIS hiding a bomb in a carry-on portable electronic device.<sup>273</sup> The ban was revoked in July, after DHS announced in June enhanced security measures at all 280 airports around the world that have direct flights into the States, including greater scrutiny of electronic devices and the use of more bomb-sniffing dogs.<sup>274</sup>

On Oct. 31, 2015, ISIS' Sinai affiliate bombed a Russian airliner, killing all 224 people on board. ISIS reportedly relied upon employees at the airport to move the bomb past security and place it on the plane.<sup>275</sup> Such an insider threat poses a substantial challenge because it enables terrorists to evade the systems designed to detect explosives, mitigating one of the main defenses against attacks on aviation.

The threat of insider attacks is not restricted to flights outside of the West. Since 9/11, there have been at least five Americans involved in jihadist activity who worked at airports. Gregory Vernon

Patterson, who was recruited by Kevin Lamar James inside California's Folsom prison, had worked at a duty free shop at Los Angeles International Airport. James thought that Patterson's inside knowledge of LAX would be helpful for his plans, and when he made a list of potential targets in California, James listed LAX. His crew planned to attack around the fourth anniversary of 9/11. They financed their activities by sticking up gas stations. Their plans came to light during a routine investigation of a gas station robbery in Torrance, California, when police found documents that laid out the group's plans for jihadist mayhem. Members of the California cell are now serving long prison terms. At the time, senior FBI official John Miller said, "Of all of the terrorist plots since 9/11, it is probably the one that operationally was closest to actually occurring."

Two years after the California cell members were arrested, another group plotted to blow up the underground pipelines that deliver jet fuel to New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport. Among the plotters was Russell Defreitas, who had worked as a baggage handler at JFK. In addition, two individuals who died conducting suicide bombings for Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Shirwa Ahmed and Abdisalan Hussein Ali, had worked in a U.S. airport. So did Abdirahmaan Muhumed, who was killed in 2014 while fighting for ISIS in Syria.

In the United Kingdom in 2010, British Airways IT expert Rajib Karim conspired with Anwar al-Awlaki to place a bomb on a plane headed to the United States. In correspondence with al-Awlaki, Karim wrote, "I do not know much about US I can work with the bros to find out the possibilities of shipping a package to a US-bound plane."<sup>276</sup>

Terrorists have also targeted unsecured areas of airports for attacks. In November 2013, Paul Ciancia walked into Los Angeles International Airport with a rifle and other firearms and killed Gerardo Hernandez, a Transportation Security Administration officer. Ciancia, though afflicted with mental health problems, was an anti-government fanatic who harbored a deep hatred

for the TSA and its officers, referring to their “Nazi checkpoints,” and told his sister before the attack that he was a “pissed-off patriot trying to water the tree of liberty.”<sup>277</sup>

In 2017, there have been two attacks with connections to jihadist ideology in unsecured locations at airports. In March, Ziyed Ben Belgacem, a French national of Tunisian descent, was shot dead after attempting to assault a security guard at France’s Orly airport outside Paris. Belgacem, who had been in trouble with the law previously for a slew of offenses, likely radicalized in prison.<sup>278</sup> The other case, mentioned previously, was Amor Ftouhi’s stabbing attack at the Flint, Michigan, airport in June.

## 5. Bioterrorism

There is something of a Moore’s Law regarding progress in biological research. The field has seen astonishing advances very quickly in recent years, including the use of CRISPR techniques to enable gene editing. This may create an opportunity for terrorists.

An examination of the educations of the 79 terrorists responsible for some of the worst anti-Western attacks<sup>279</sup> — the World Trade Center bombing in 1993, the Africa embassy bombings in 1998, the 9/11 attacks of 2001, the Bali nightclub bombings in Indonesia in 2002 and the London bombings on July 7, 2005 — found that only one had obtained a degree in biology. One of the three masterminds of the Bali bombings, Aris Sumarsono, better known as Zulkarnaen, is among the top leaders of the al-Qaeda affiliated group Jemaah Islamiyah and had studied biology at an Indonesian college.<sup>280</sup>

We should not be so much concerned with terrorists who try to master biological weapons, but rather trained biologists becoming effective terrorists. In short, the threat of a jihadist biological weapons attack is likely to emerge from an Islamist version of Bruce Ivins. (Ivins was the microbiologist seen

responsible for the anthrax attacks in the United States shortly after 9/11, killing five people.)

## 6. Hostage-Taking<sup>281</sup>

According to a database maintained by New America, nearly 300 Westerners are known to have been taken hostage by jihadist groups over the last 16 years, including 50 Americans. On average, 18 Westerners have been kidnapped by jihadists each year over that period. These kidnappings, driven primarily by the Syrian civil war and the expansion of ISIS, peaked at 45 in 2013, declining to 10 in 2016.<sup>282</sup>

The United States and the United Kingdom adhere to strict no-concessions policies that prohibit the payment of ransoms to designated terrorist groups. Other Western nations, notably EU members Germany, France, Italy, and Spain, have either paid ransoms to jihadist groups directly or allowed them to be paid by third parties to secure the release of their citizens.

These policies are reflected in the very different outcomes for American and British hostages compared to hostages from ransom-paying countries. Eighty-one percent of European Union hostages held by jihadist terrorist groups since 9/11 were freed, compared to 25 percent for the United States and 33 percent for the United Kingdom.<sup>283</sup>

Of the 130 Westerners kidnapped by al-Qaeda and its affiliates, more than three-quarters were freed. Only three of the nine Americans taken by these groups were freed. Three were murdered, one was killed in a U.S. drone strike, one was killed during a rescue attempt and one remains in captivity. Fifteen Americans were taken hostage by ISIS and its precursor groups. Thirteen were murdered, one died in captivity and one was released. Three of the four British hostages taken by ISIS and its precursor groups were murdered and one remains in captivity. Of the four American hostages taken by ISIS in Syria, three — James Foley, Steven Sotloff, and Peter

Kassig — were murdered. One, Kayla Mueller, died in captivity. Of the 16 continental European hostages held by ISIS in Syria, 14 were released.

Despite the recent decline in the number of incidents, jihadist groups continue to kidnap Westerners for propaganda and ransom. Ransom payments remain the primary source of funding for groups like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Abu Sayyaf. An investigation by Rukmini Callimachi of the *New York Times* concluded that al-Qaeda made \$125 million from ransoms between 2008 and 2014.<sup>284</sup>

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The importance of ransom to such groups varies depending on their access to other, more stable revenue streams. Kidnapping profits are far outstripped by funding derived from territorial control, such as taxation and oil sales. We estimate, for example, that ransoms accounted for no more than 4 percent of ISIS' total income in 2014. According to a financial assessment by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies Center on Sanctions and Illicit Finance, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula made \$30 million, half of its revenue from 2011 to 2013, from kidnapping for ransom. While it controlled the port city of Mukalla, Yemen, from April 2015 to April 2016, it collected "up to \$2 million per day in port taxes" and made "perhaps more than \$750 million" in total.<sup>285</sup>

There are at least 13 Westerners<sup>286</sup> currently being held hostage by jihadist groups. Six of these hostages are held by the Haqqani Network, five by

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), one by the Abu Sayyaf Group and one by ISIS.

Those held by the Haqqani Network include American Caitlan Coleman, her Canadian husband Joshua Boyle, and their two sons born in captivity, Najaeshi and Dhakwoen Coleman-Boyle. Also held by the Haqqanis are two teachers from the American University of Afghanistan in Kabul, American Kevin King and Australian Timothy Weeks.

Five other Westerners are held by al-Qaeda affiliated groups in North Africa. A hostage video released in July 2017 showed five Western AQIM hostages.<sup>287</sup> One of them, dual South African and British citizen Stephen Malcolm McGown, was released for ransom in August 2017.<sup>288</sup> The other Western hostages shown were Beatrice Stockly of Switzerland, Iulian Ghergut of Romania, Sophie Petronin of France, and Ken Elliott of Australia. Gloria Cecilia Narvaez of Colombia is also shown. Notably absent from the video was American Jeffery Woodke, who was kidnapped in Niger in October 2016. A U.S. State Department official speaking on background told the *Daily Beast* in late July 2017 that Woodke was still alive.<sup>289</sup>

Ewold Horn of the Netherlands was kidnapped by the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines in 2012. He was still alive and in good health in December of 2016, according to Philippine intelligence sources.<sup>290</sup>

John Cantlie of the United Kingdom is the only Westerner remaining in ISIS captivity. On July 28, 2017, Al-Masdar News reported that Cantlie was dead.<sup>291</sup> The article cited an Al-Sura News Agency interview with three captured ISIS fighters, but the report has not been confirmed. Cantlie was last seen alive in an ISIS propaganda video released in December 2016.<sup>292</sup>

## **7. The Merging of Terrorism and the Media<sup>293</sup>**

The media environment in which terrorists act has changed significantly over the past few decades.

In 1985, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher spoke about terrorism at the annual convention of the American Bar Association. Following a recent high-profile hijacking of a TWA passenger flight forced to land in Beirut, Lebanon, Thatcher said news organizations “must try to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend.”<sup>294</sup>

Though her plea raised thorny questions of how and whether to shape news coverage to deny terrorists publicity, media organizations in the 1980s and 1990s were capable of exercising a gatekeeping role. Since Thatcher made her remarks, however, technology and the media industry have undergone substantial changes that at the very least reshape who can exercise a gatekeeping role and may even eliminate the possibility of gatekeeping.

In 1993, when jihadist terrorists bombed the World Trade Center in New York, the news first broke by radio almost half an hour later, cellphones existed but were rare, and only 14 percent of Americans had internet access.<sup>295</sup> When al-Qaeda conducted the 9/11 attacks, live television dominated the news coverage, and through the early 2000s al-Qaeda continued to rely upon news organizations such as Al Jazeera to publish its videos and claims of responsibility for attacks.<sup>296</sup>

However, by the 2005 London bombings, a major technological shift had occurred: Cellphones were ubiquitous and they now had integrated cameras, allowing individuals to provide images in the aftermath of a terrorist attack. By 2009, when the Fort Hood, Texas, shooting occurred, social media was coming into its own, further democratizing the provision of information.

These changes have democratized the media industry, but they have also allowed terrorists to claim responsibility for their own attacks. Facebook is a common tool for jihadist terrorists to declare their support for ISIS. In 2016, Omar Mateen, the terrorist in Orlando who killed 49 at a gay nightclub, pledged his allegiance to ISIS on Facebook as he carried out his attack. Larossi Abballa, an ISIS-

inspired militant, killed a police official and his partner in Magnanville, France, in June 2016. Immediately after the murders, Abballa broadcast himself live on Facebook declaring his allegiance to ISIS.<sup>297</sup>

ISIS publishes its own propaganda magazine in multiple languages, broadcasts its activities via Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms, and operates what is essentially its own news wire service, Amaq.

Social media companies need to evaluate how they will address terrorist content on their platforms. These companies have increasingly taken up this challenge, blocking and removing such content. However, as the trend toward democratization of media continues, the ability to exercise effective gatekeeping of terrorist content becomes more and more difficult, reshaping the way terrorists operate and the threat they pose.

## 8. Ramadan Attacks<sup>298</sup>

While in the past Ramadan has been treated as a month for peace, ISIS has sought to turn this period, observed in Islam by fasting and prayer, into a focal point for acts of violence. The group has used its propaganda organs to call for attacks specifically during Ramadan, with special attention to attacks in the West. “Ramadan, the month of conquest and jihad. Get prepared, be ready ... to make it a month of calamity everywhere for the non-believers ... especially for the fighters and supporters of the caliphate in Europe and America.”<sup>299</sup> This came from ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani — who issued a similar call for violence during Ramadan in 2015 — at the end of May 2016, just before the start of Ramadan. ISIS repeated the call for violence during this year’s Ramadan, and the call was heeded.<sup>300</sup>

On May 26, 2017, the first day of Ramadan, ISIS claimed responsibility for a shooting attack that killed at least 28 on a bus carrying Coptic Christians in Egypt’s Minya province. Four days later, twin bombings in Baghdad killed at least 22. In an attack

of special malevolence, one of the bombs detonated outside an ice cream parlor. ISIS also claimed responsibility for these attacks.<sup>301</sup>

Another trend in Ramadan bombings over 2016 and 2017 is the significance of the 27th day of Ramadan, the Night of Power, which is particularly sacred for the world's Muslims as the time that the Prophet Mohammed started receiving the first verses of the Koran. In 2016, the 27th day of Ramadan fell on July 2. This is the day that ISIS attackers in Bangladesh massacred 20 at a restaurant popular with foreigners in the capital, Dhaka. It was also the day that ISIS launched a vehicle bomb attack that killed more than 200 in Baghdad. In 2017, the 27th day fell on June 21, the same day Amor Ftouhi attacked an officer with a knife at the airport in Flint, Michigan.<sup>302</sup>

### **9. The Continued Absence of CBRN Attacks by Jihadists in the United States While Terrorists Motivated by Other Ideologies Are Trying to Develop Such Weapons<sup>303</sup>**

Weapons of mass destruction have continued to be absent in attacks by jihadist terrorists in the West. Of 71 attacks conducted by jihadists in the West since 2014, none involved chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons (CBRN). Of the 415 people in the United States accused of jihadist

terrorism-related crimes since 9/11, none acquired such weapons.

However, there is a threat in the United States from these weapons from individuals motivated by other ideologies. Thirteen individuals motivated by right-wing extremist ideology, one motivated by left-wing extremist ideology and two with idiosyncratic beliefs have used or acquired such weapons or their precursors.<sup>304</sup> For example, William Krar and Judith Bruey, two anti-government extremists arrested in 2003, possessed precursor chemicals for hydrogen cyanide gas, while Michael Alan Crooker, another anti-government extremist, pleaded guilty in 2011 to possessing the biological toxin ricin and threatening an officer of the U.S. government.<sup>305</sup> In 2015, Glendon Scott Crawford, a member of the Ku Klux Klan, became the first person to be convicted of trying to acquire a radiological weapon of mass destruction inside the United States. The plot to use an X-ray device to attack Muslim targets was monitored by undercover officers.<sup>306</sup>

Terrorists continue to prefer the old standby weapons of bombs and firearms. The innovation that has occurred in weaponry and tactics used in attacks in the West has been almost entirely on the low end through the adoption of vehicle rammings and stabbings. This is likely because such methods have proven themselves just as effective at creating mayhem and murder with far less need for technical know-how or training.

# WHAT CAN BE DONE?

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There seems to be some conceptual confusion in the U.S. government about what “Countering Violent Extremism” programs are attempting to do: Is it counter-radicalization? Or is it counter-recruitment? Counter-radicalization — turning many millions of Muslims around the world away from radical ideas — seems both a nebulous mission and one that may not be achievable. A far more specific task is to stop the relatively small number of Muslims trying to join ISIS or al-Qaeda, or signing up for their ideology, from doing so. From a U.S. national security perspective, that recruitment is, after all, what we want to prevent.

**Here are some ideas about what could be done.**

## **1. Enlist rather than alienate the Muslim community.**

The terrorist attacks in San Bernardino and Orlando touched off a furious political debate about how best to safeguard Americans, featuring such solutions as shutting off Muslim immigration. But that would not do much to deal with the threat, because lethal attacks by jihadist terrorists in the States since 9/11 have been conducted largely by American citizens.

In fact, the real lessons learned should come from the law enforcement agencies that have studied

jihadist terrorists in depth. A very telling indicator of future violence by a terrorist, FBI behavioral analysts have found, is what they term “leakage.” Leakage was first identified by the FBI in 1999 in the context of school shootings, emerging from the observation that a student who was going to do something violent had often intentionally or unintentionally revealed something significant about the impending act — anything from confiding in a friend to making ominous “they’ll be sorry” remarks. Leakage is, in short, when a violent perpetrator signals to people in his circle that he is planning an act of violence.<sup>307</sup>

What was true of school shootings turned out to be true for terrorist crimes as well. In an ongoing study of some 80 terrorism cases in the U.S. since 2009, the FBI found that leakage happened more than 80 percent of the time. Those to whom information was leaked, termed “bystanders,” were broken down by the FBI into peers, family members, authority figures and strangers. FBI analysts found an average of three bystanders per case, and in one case as many as 14. Some bystanders saw radicalization behavior. Others saw actual plotting and planning, such as the accumulation of weapons, self-educating about how to make explosives or preparations to travel overseas for terrorist training.

The analysts were dismayed by how common it was for bystanders to know that a radicalized

individual was up to something yet failed to tip off the authorities. Analysts graphed out the bystanders who were most likely to come forward with information versus those least likely to do so. Peers were aware of the most concerning information, but they were the least likely to volunteer it. Family members were often aware of both radicalization and planning, but they came forward less often than authority figures such as college professors, supervisors, military commanders, or clerics. These figures were reasonably likely to offer information but were more aware of a suspect's radical sympathies than of any actual plotting.

Strangers were the most likely to come forward, which can be helpful.<sup>308</sup> However, they made up only 5 percent of the bystanders with useful information about a suspect.

The importance of the information that a peer can have was underlined by the 2015 terrorist attack in San Bernardino, in which 14 people were killed by a married couple, Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik. Farook's friend Enrique Marquez provided the two semiautomatic rifles that Farook and his wife used in the massacre.<sup>309</sup> Marquez also knew as early as 2011 that Farook was planning to carry out some kind of terrorist attack.<sup>310</sup> Marquez pleaded guilty in 2017 to a variety of federal crimes.

The lesson of the FBI study of terrorism cases is that the most useful information comes from peers and family members. That's why outreach to Muslim communities to enlist their help in detecting those who may be becoming militant is the most fruitful approach to dealing with the scourge of terrorism. This is the opposite approach from painting all Muslim immigrants as potential terrorists.

## **2. Either through electronic warfare or other means, take out ISIS' propaganda production facilities in the Middle East and elsewhere.**

After the June 2016 attack at the café in Dhaka, Bangladesh, that killed 20, ISIS announced its

involvement through Amaq, which is effectively its news agency. Why does Amaq continue to exist? Also, ISIS continues to pump out online videos, audios, and webzines. These require at least crude production facilities, which also should be eliminated. (Of course, some will argue that there is some intelligence value derived from ISIS propaganda facilities continuing to function, but surely that is outweighed by the value of the larger enterprise of minimizing ISIS' appeal.)

## **3. Institute a safe zone in northern Syria.**

President Trump and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson have both called for safe zones in Syria. This is an excellent idea in theory, because it would reduce the battlefield success of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, who is the principal driver of the Syrian war. It would also reduce the flow of refugees into Europe. But implementing such safe zones would be quite complex, according to multiple discussions with U.S. military officials based in the Middle East, because it would entail a no-fly zone for it to succeed.

First, U.S. fighter pilots would need appropriate authority to shoot down Syrian planes defying the no-fly zone. Second, some Syrian air force planes are the same model as some of the older Russian planes flying over Syria. Third, Syria has excellent air defenses that would have to be taken out. The Russians have deployed the SA-23 surface-to-air missile system to Syria, which, according to U.S. military officials, is one of the most sophisticated air defense systems in the world. Fourth, as a matter of international law, a no-fly zone in Syria would require some kind of U.N. resolution authorizing it — and Russia would veto such a measure.

In 1999, NATO did impose a no-fly zone in Kosovo without seeking a U.N. resolution, in order to carry out airstrikes on Serbian forces. Trump could do something similar, for instance, unilaterally ordering U.S. warplanes to bomb Syrian airfields so Assad's warplanes could no longer use them. Of course, this would be a significant escalation of

America's role in the conflict and would also skirt international law.

That said, a safe zone would save many lives and do much to reduce the flow of refugees out of Syria, so the U.S. government and its allies as well as Russia should work to institute such a safe zone.

#### **4. Build a database of all the “foreign fighters” who have gone to Syria to fight for ISIS and the al-Qaeda affiliate there.**

This is one of the recommendations of the House Homeland Security Committee's 2015 report on foreign fighters in Syria, and it is a very good one.<sup>311</sup> How can you prevent an attack by returning foreign fighters if you are not cognizant of their names and links to ISIS? Right now, Interpol has a list of some 8,000 foreign fighters, but it is dwarfed by the estimated 40,000 foreign fighters who have gone to Syria.<sup>312</sup>

#### **5. Continue to partner with social media companies such as Twitter to enforce their own terms of use to take down any material that encourages violence, whether from ISIS or from neo-Nazis and other extremists.**

Between August 2015 and December 2016, according to CNN, Twitter removed 636,248 accounts for their ties to extremism.<sup>313</sup> Social media companies should continue this approach.

#### **6. Relentlessly hammer home the message that while ISIS positions itself as the defender of Muslims, its victims are overwhelmingly fellow Muslims.**

#### **7. No-Fly, No-Buy. Prevent suspected terrorists from buying military-style assault rifles.**

Astonishingly, over the past decade or so more than 2,000 people known or suspected to be terrorists have bought firearms.<sup>314</sup> Even while suspected jihadist terrorists are under some form of FBI investigation, they can easily buy military-style assault weapons. Omar Mateen, Nidal Hasan, and Carlos Bledsoe — three of the most prominent domestic terrorists since 9/11 — were all FBI subjects of interest, yet all legally purchased semiautomatic weapons shortly before their attacks. Congress should pass a law preventing this from happening in the future.

#### **8. Stay in Afghanistan**

Afghanistan is going down the tubes and it is in worse shape than it has been since 9/11. The Taliban control or contest a third of the population. That's 10 million people — more than ISIS controlled at the height of its power in the summer of 2014, when it might have had 8 million people at most under its control.

The Obama administration had a counterproductive policy of announcing withdrawals from Afghanistan even as it surged troops into the country. Exhibit A: the Dec. 1, 2009, speech at West Point, where the president announced the troop surge as well as a withdrawal date. Of course, that date came and went, as did a number of others. The pattern of announcing proposed withdrawal dates for U.S. forces has enabled the Taliban to believe they can simply wait out the clock. It also has contributed to a lack of confidence among the Afghan population: Eight out of 10 say the Afghan army and police need support from countries such as the United States if they are to do their jobs properly, according to polling by the Asia Foundation in 2015.<sup>315</sup>

It is in American and Afghan interests for the United States to stay in Afghanistan so it doesn't turn into a version of Iraq circa 2014, with the Taliban controlling much of the country while also hosting a strong presence of ISIS and al-Qaeda, as well as other jihadist groups.

What to do? Publicly state that the United States already has a Strategic Partnership with Afghanistan until 2024 (as negotiated by the Obama administration) and promise to be there for the long term in an advise and assist capacity along the usual lines of providing intelligence, Special Forces trainers, close air support, and the like. Afghans don't care if we have 8,400 troops, 12,000 troops or 20,000 troops. Clearly there is a difference from a purely military point of view, but from a *political* point of view, the message Afghans want to hear is that the United States is not abandoning them and plans to stay the course. Such a public announcement of a long-term commitment to Afghanistan would help NATO and other allies to also commit for the long term; at the same time, it would undermine the Taliban and change the calculus of the hedging strategies of neighbors such as Pakistan.

President Trump's speech on his Afghanistan and South Asia strategy at Fort Myer, Virginia, on Aug. 21, 2017, went a long way to making the case for the enduring U.S. commitment to Afghanistan.

### **9. Continue to fund "micro-targeting" counter-messaging efforts for those looking at ISIS propaganda.**

Advertisers on the internet routinely direct micro-targeted adverts to consumers looking at, say, shoes, and there is no technical reason this could not be done effectively for those looking at ISIS propaganda. Indeed, companies such as Google are already doing this, and the State Department is quietly supporting similar efforts around the Muslim world using local voices in local languages to counter the message of ISIS.

### **10. Increase funding and research for "photo DNA" technologies of the kind that have largely banished child pornography images from social media platforms.**

Photo DNA allows banned images to be tagged and removed from the internet whenever they appear, and it has been quite successful in preventing the proliferation of child porn. ISIS propaganda that encourages violence should be similarly tagged and banned.

### **11. Congress should pass a new Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF).**

U.S. military operations in seven Muslim countries are authorized by the AUMF that was passed just days after 9/11. Sixteen years later, the American public deserves a real debate and vote by its representatives in Congress about the scope and length of U.S. operations against ISIS, al-Qaeda and like-minded groups.

### **12. Do not designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization, as advocated by some in the Trump administration.**

Some Trump administration officials want to designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. This is a bad idea that would surely backfire, as it would effectively criminalize and label as terrorists the tens of millions of Muslims around the world who are part of the Muslim Brotherhood. While it is certainly the case that a small number of Muslim Brothers have radicalized and engaged in terrorism, that does not make the Brotherhood a terrorist organization. There are tens of millions of Christian fundamentalists in the United States, a tiny number of whom have conducted violence against abortion clinics and doctors, yet that would not be an argument for criminalizing Christian fundamentalists.

Also, members of the Muslim Brotherhood play significant roles in the governments of Iraq, Jordan, Tunisia, and Turkey. Designating the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization would label as criminals political leaders of those countries,

some of which are close U.S. allies and all of which happen to be relatively open societies compared to the Gulf state autocracies. In Egypt, the government of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has criminalized the Muslim Brotherhood, an extraordinary

decision since it effectively criminalized the largest opposition organization in the country as well as the previous government of President Mohammed Morsi.

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