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By Amy Kraft

At least 300 American Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) sympathizers are spreading propaganda for the terrorist group and actively recruiting individuals on Twitter, according to a report from the Program on Extremism at George Washington University.

The report, which drew on extensive interviews, court records and media reports, found that American ISIS supporters "spasmodically create accounts that often get suspended in a never-ending cat-and-mouse game." A new Twitter account or multiple accounts with a variation of the previous username spring up within hours, like the heads of a hydra.

Researchers also discovered that while American ISIS supporters tend to be male, nearly a third of the social media accounts examined appear to be operated by women.

The majority of American ISIS supporters on Twitter use avatars of black flags, lions and green birds, a symbol that celebrates the virtues of martyrdom, the report found. Most of them post in English.

Identifying the accounts was challenging because most were anonymous, the researchers said, so they relied on a number of clues: some users self-identified as American; some were spotted through Twitter’s geo-locating tools; and some used the Arabic "al-Amriki," or "the American," in their Twitter handles. The researchers also analyzed their use of language, spelling and cultural references.

Twitter accounts were broken down into three categories of users: nodes, amplifiers, and shout-outs.

The nodes are identified as the top voices in the ISIS Twittersphere and are the ones who primarily create content for the network.

Amplifiers retweet and "favorite" material from popular users. (The report noted that because of the lack of original content from amplifiers, it is unclear whether...
or not they are real people or Twitter handles programmed to post automatically.)

Shout-outs introduce new accounts to the community and promote the new accounts of previously suspended users.

American supporters also act as "spotters" for future recruits.

The report stated:

*In one case the seemingly naïve individual posted general questions about religion, to which ISIS supporters quickly responded in a calm and authoritative manner. After a few weeks, the accounts of hardened ISIS supporters slowly introduced increasingly ardent views into the conversation. The new recruit was then invited to continue the conversion privately, often via Twitter’s Direct Message feature or on other private messaging platforms such as surespot.*

The researchers also point out that "ISIS-related radicalization is by no means limited to social media." While some supporters express their interest solely online, in a number of cases U.S. extremists "cultivated and later strengthened their interest in ISIS’s narrative through face-to-face relationships. In most cases online and offline dynamics complement one another," the authors write.

The report highlights how the Internet has overhauled radicalization and made it more accessible to the masses.

"Some of the most important intelligence is no longer secret," Jane Harman, a former member of Congress and the president of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, wrote in the forward to the report. "**Some of the best information** is open-source, plastered on message boards or a 19-year-old’s Twitter feed. Policymakers have been slow to adapt; spies would still rather squint at satellite photos than scrape Facebook feeds."

Fox 5: "**New report examines ISIS recruitment of American teens**, December 1, 2015

By Tom Fitzgerald

**WASHINGTON** - There is a new report released that shows ISIS is working to recruit young people to carry out and support terrorist attacks.
Experts say ISIS has been unsuccessful in getting its own members into the United States. Now, they are using social media to recruit young people already in the country and radicalizing them into becoming Islamic extremists and getting them to carry out ISIS-related attacks.

This new report was issued by George Washington University's Program on Extremism. It identifies Virginia as being one of the hotspots.

Earlier this year, a Prince William County teenager pleaded guilty of helping another person travel to Syria to join ISIS.

Ali Amin, a 17-year-old student at Osbourn Park High School, pleaded guilty in June to federal charges that he used bitcoin to raise money for ISIS and used Twitter to help recruit for the terror group. He remains one of the youngest people ever in the U.S. to plead guilty of federal terror charges.

The FBI found that Amin went further by helping 18-year-old Reza Niknejad, also from Prince William County, to purchase a ticket to Syria through money Amin raised on bitcoin.

Amin then drove Niknejad to Dulles International Airport so Niknejad could fly to Syria and join ISIS.

Amin is currently serving an 11-year sentence for providing material support to a known terror group. This case is cited in this report, which details arrests of ISIS-related individuals throughout the country up until last month.

"The tempo of the ISIS arrests has been kicking in the last year," said Seamus Hughes, deputy director for the Program on Extremism at George Washington University’s Center for Cyber and Homeland Security. "Fifty-six individuals this year alone have been arrested for ISIS-related charges and that’s an unprecedented number -- the largest number we have had since 9/11."

"We cannot arrest our way out of this problem," said Lorenzo Vidino, the director of the Program on Extremism. "A strictly law enforcement-based approach to this cannot do the job by itself."

Researchers at George Washington University spent the last six months pouring over 7,000 pages of court documents on the homegrown ISIS recruits that have been arrested. What they found paints a picture of who these individuals are.
The average age of an ISIS recruit is 26 years old. They are 86 percent male and 55 percent have been arrested in undercover operations.

How do they counter this? Experts say there needs to be better monitoring of so-called "keyboard warriors" on social media to stop them before they are recruited by ISIS. Many of these individuals are socially isolated or alone.

They also advise that religious or community groups reach out to these at-risk individuals before they are fully recruited and pose a real threat.

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**Voice of America:** “[Speed, Social Media Shape Counterterrorism Probes](https://www.voanews.com/content/speed-social-media-shape-counterterrorism-probes/3322309.html), December 1, 2015

By Katherine Gibson

In the aftermath of the Paris attacks, officials carried out waves of raids and arrests to try to break up terror cells across Europe. As in any criminal investigation, the crime scene provides key evidence that leads investigators to suspects still at large.

But as former counterterrorism officials told VOA, investigations of terror attacks differ in two key aspects: They’re accelerated by the possibility of another attack, and a wealth of information about the suspects spreads across social media.

“After a major attack, you’re always worried about the next attack, so you want to make sure you figure out who is in that network and how you take down that network before they commit another attack,” said Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University.

The investigation begins at the crime scene. As with any criminal investigation, police seal off the area and forensic teams go in to dust for fingerprints and
collect evidence. It’s the speed at which this is done that makes a terror attack probe different.

“The French police were desperate to move that at an incredibly accelerated rate because there was the great fear that there was going to be another terrorist action taking place, maybe within the hour,” said Raymond Batvinis, a former FBI agent who has run counterterrorism training sessions since the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States.

The evidence at the crime scene combined with eyewitness interviews can lead investigators to a search online, where valuable data on locations, connections and motives can help build a background profile.

“You’re collecting all of these phone numbers, all of this data, all of this email data, all of the texting data, all of the Facebook and Twitter data, and they’re building up a profile of the individual, of who his or her contacts are,” Batvinis said.

**Digital communication**

Social media — the connection point for so many terrorists — can speed up the investigation. The demographics of potential extremists lend themselves particularly well to communication on digital platforms.

"Given the ages of the attackers and most people joining ISIS, they tend to be younger, which means they’re on social media," Hughes said. "They have a profile. They have a sense of it. They’ve been using it for years and you can get a sense of who their network is. You can see them when they pop their head up."

Working off that real-time information can lead investigators to the neighborhoods where the terrorists live.

“We would be knocking on doors, we would be ringing bells, we would be there all night getting people out of bed and saying, 'Your name showed up. Let’s sit down and have a conversation,' ” Batvinis said.

Batvinis and Hughes said those conversations could range from the helpful to the confrontational. Many investigators go into such sessions hoping to establish a rapport with the interviewees that will yield the small pieces of information that contribute to the larger picture.
Ultimately, Batvinis said, it is up to an experienced investigator to know how seemingly disparate and often scattered pieces of information fit together and lead to the decision to stage a raid.

“It’s not scientific. The tips come in and you look at them, and frankly it requires an experienced eye to say, 'We’re going to prioritize this.' ”

Ultimately, the pressured timelines of a terrorism investigation led to the raids seen in Paris and Brussels, which could prevent future attacks and provide investigators with the crucial information for criminal prosecutions.

Texas Public Radio: “U.S. Authorities Have Arrested 56 ISIS Sympathizers This Year, Report Finds”, December 1, 2015


WNEW-FM: Interview, December 1, 2015

WSB-TV Atlanta: “Study finds hundreds of Americas supporting ISIS”, December 1, 2015

Federal authorities have arrested more than 70 ISIS supporters and say hundreds more are active on social media in the United States.

A new report from George Washington University gives a picture of the support the terrorist group has here at home and the recruitment efforts targeting Americans.

The study found 71 Americans charged in the U.S. for ISIS-related crimes.

“Of the 71 individuals (arrested) we’ve seen arrested the vast, vast majority are U.S. citizens born and bred here in the U.S.,” said Lorenzo Vidino, with the GW Program on Extremism.

An aspiring rapper turned jihadist fighter on the ground in Syria and a young newlywed Mississippi couple allegedly moving from radical Twitter posts to a plan to travel to Syria and join ISIS are just two examples of the terrorist groups efforts in America.
Another case was an Augusta, Georgia man, Leon Davis, who was arrested at the Atlanta airport on his way to Turkey to join ISIS. Most of this plea agreement for Davis is sealed.

The GW study found more than 350 twitter accounts of Americans who are ISIS supporters.

One ISIS fighter took to Twitter to explain his motivation. “You fly a remote control plane halfway around the world to kill an enemy you are too coward to meet face to face,” the tweet read.

“They’re in a pre-criminal space they’re exercising their first amendment right to free speech of saying support for ISIS, which is nothing illegal but obviously cause for concern,” Vidino said.

The study’s authors say the difficultly for law enforcement is figuring out which of those keyboard warriors make the leap to actual militants.


CNN’s Anderson Cooper 360: Interview, December 2, 2015

CNN’s Chris Cuomo: “Study: ISIS support in U.S. reaches unprecedented level”, December 2, 2015


CNN’s The Lead with Jake Tapper: “Expert on radicalism analyzes San Bernardino killers”, December 3, 2015

CNN’s The Situation Room With Wolf Blitzer: “Was San Bernardino suspect radicalized?”, December 3, 2015

Fox 5: “Social media a key tool used by ISIS to radicalized Americans”, December 3, 2015

By Sarah Simmons

WASHINGTON - Even though questions still surround the San Bernardino, California mass shooting, the research on Muslim extremists is starting to paint a clearer picture of ISIS in America.

It was just two days ago that the Program on Extremism at George Washington University came out with a report, “ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa.”

In the report, researchers specifically looked at Americans who have become radicalized. Law enforcement knows of 250 Americans who have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria or Iraq to join the Islamic State. And there are investigations underway in all 50 states.

Social media is one of the main tools for ISIS to recruit teenagers. Dr. Lorenzo Vidino, the co-author of the report, said for some, specifically younger individuals, it can be a sense of rebellion and adventure, almost like a video game to them and they don't understand the reality of it.

For adults, ISIS knows exactly who they are looking for and how to groom them into joining their cause.

“ISIS approaches vulnerable people -- people who are just looking for friends online, looking for meaning,” said Vidino. “And the initial approach is very soft. ‘Let’s talk. I’m a friend. Let’s talk about Islam. Let’s talk about the poor children and families being killed in Syria.' Things a lot of people can relate to and that’s exactly like how pedophiles groom people online. It’s that softer approach, and with time, it becomes harder and then you hit with the really violent part.”
Some who are already of the Islamic faith could be feeling attacked or alienated. Also from a security standpoint, this is a serious issue. Statistically, Vidino said it is only a few hundred individuals that are of concern out of two million American Muslims.

Another interesting point Dr. Vidino talked about is that we always think of American Islamic extremists traveling overseas to Iraq and Syria to receive training. But that is not always the case. ISIS can groom online and aid in a violent attack without their asset ever leaving the country.


By Kristine Frazao

WASHINGTON (Sinclair Broadcast Group) — As the reports started pouring in following the massacre in San Bernadino, Calif. Wednesday, the details were just a little too familiar for Lt. Col Anthony Schaffer (Ret.), a defense expert for Sinclair

He said the planning, the military precision and the attack on a soft target raised red flags.

"Based on the evidence I've seen, this attack fits the profile, the known profile of Charlie Hebdo, elements of that attack as well as the ISIS attack in Paris a few weeks ago."

Thursday, law enforcement officials told CNN that Syed Rizwan Farook was radicalized and had been in touch with people being investigated by the FBI for international terrorism.

Seamus Hughes, with the George Washington University Program on Extremism, said regardless of ideology, the suspects were indeed radicalized.

"You know someone's drawn in to say, you know I've reached a point where i need to cross that line and commit an act. They're no longer just upset at home they want to actually commit a violent act," Hughes said.

He co-authored a report released this week about ISIS in america.

In it, research points squarely to social media - a central player in the process of radicalization.
It creates a space in which isis sympathizers can be groomed from afar. It acts as a defacto travel agent - giving numbers and locations for those who wish to travel.

And finally serving as a sort of devil on the shoulder - a concept referred to by FBI Director James Comey over the summer in testimony before the Senate Select Intelligence Committee.

"It's as if a devil sits on someone's shoulder all day long saying kill, kill, kill and the terrorist if you want to talk to them is right there, in your device," Comey said.

Before the internet, experts say radicalization mostly happened during in-person meetings

"You’d talk to someone once a week, you’d hear a lecture, get riled up but then have to wait a few more days to hear the next one now you kinda get your propaganda on demand," Hughes said.

The report concludes that quick and easy access can turn keyboard warriors into battlefield commanders.

**NBC Nightly News With Lester Holt:** Interview, December 3, 2015

**PBS Newshour:** “The terrorism question looming over the San Bernardino attack”, December 3, 2015

**Wall Street Journal:** “ISIS in America: Three Key Findings”, December 3, 2015

**ABC 7 WJLA:** “Changing role of women in terrorism and extremism”, December 4

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1 Reproduced by Yahoo News: [http://news.yahoo.com/video/isis-america-three-key-findings-151202242.html](http://news.yahoo.com/video/isis-america-three-key-findings-151202242.html)
CNN’s The Situation Room With Wolf Blitzer: Interview, December 4, 2015

MSNBC’s Hardball with Chris Matthews: “How ISIS recruits Americans”, December 4, 2015

MSNBC’s Live With Thomas Roberts: “Feds don’t know if Malik influenced husband”, December 4, 2015

NBC: Interview, December 4, 2015

CNN: “Wife’s Shooter Pledged Allegiance to ISIS; ISIS Study Radicalization Can Take Just Weeks; Terror in America: ISIS Calls California Shooters ‘Supporters’”, December 5, 2015

Fox: “ISIS in America study: Recruits extremely diverse”, December 5, 2015

MSNBC with Alex Witt: “How ISIS recruits in the United States”, December 6, 2015

RTE Radio 1: “The role Social Media in encouraging potential attackers”, December 6, 2015

The Dean Obeidallah Show: Interview, December 6, 2015


NPR: “San Bernardino And The Islamic State”, December 7, 2015


The Diane Rehm Show: “Growing Pressure On Social Media Sites To Monitor And Remove Terrorist Content”, December 8, 2015

The Today Show: “What sets people down the road to radicalization?”, December 8, 2015

ABC 3340: “How women are playing a role in terrorism”, December 9, 2015

CBS’ This Morning: Interview, December 9, 2015

NBC’s Today Show: “Social media companies called on to help fight terrorists online”, December 9, 2015

Fox News’ Happening Now: Interview, December 9, 2015

CNN’s Newsroom With Carol Costello: Interview, December 10, 2015
WTOP-FM: Interview, December 10, 2015


Articles


By James Gordon Meek

Researchers examining the lives of more than 70 terrorism suspects collared by the FBI over the past year found no typical profile among these Americans beyond the allure of the spectacular savagery of the "Islamic State," according to a report released today.

The average age of those arrested and several killed in violent confrontations with law enforcement was 26 -- but some who became radicalized and enamored by ISIS were in their teens and some were pushing retirement age, the study by the Program on Extremism found.

"It is apparent that the U.S. is home to a small but active cadre of individuals infatuated with ISIS’s ideology, some of whom have decided to mobilize in its furtherance," the report said.

The pool of Americans supporting ISIS is not only unprecedented in the number of terrorism arrests since the 9/11 attacks in 2001, but includes women, who account for 14 percent of the arrests in a startling new trend largely unseen in U.S. counter-terrorism.

"They find the solution to their problems, real or imagined, in ISIS," said the report’s author, Lorenzo Vidino. "But it's not just kids fantasizing about joining ISIS. There are some very serious cases.”
Also over represented among those picked up by agents for plotting or moving toward acts of violence in the U.S. or abroad are Muslim converts, who made up 40 percent of the cases studied.

The ISIS "caliphate," which tries to appear as a legitimate state, is "emboldening individuals and groups" to travel or support the group inside the U.S. homeland, said LAPD chief of counter-terrorism Michael Downing at a discussion of the report in Washington.

Law enforcement’s overriding concern is "about preventing the next attack," and have charged some suspects with offense lesser than terrorism-related offenses, such as lying to federal agents.

"U.S. prosecutors have gotten a bit creative with charges," said report co-author Seamus Hughes, a former Senate and National Counterterrorism Center official.

The study, "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," was a painstaking undertaking by a team from the program at George Washington University's Center for Cyber and Homeland Security, who examined arrests in 21 states.

"The profiles of individuals involved in ISIS-related activities in the U.S. differ widely in race, age, social class, education and family background. Their motivations are equally diverse and defy easy analysis," the report said.

As has been well documented, social media plays a central role as bait to those Muslims who are lured in by the appeal of the so-called "caliphate" declared in June 2014 by ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in Syria and Iraq.

The Program on Extremism identified at least 300 active Twitter supporters of ISIS who appear to be inside the U.S. But with over 900 active investigations in all 50 states, researchers said there are almost certainly more than 300 Americans enamored by ISIS and radicalized toward supporting the violence that defines the foreign terrorist group.

Former State Department counter-terrorism official Alberto Fernandez said ISIS lures in American supporters with propaganda that is more secular in tone than what Middle Easterners are exposed to.

"The material in Arabic is more religious. The material in English is less religious," Fernandez said.

ISIS operatives in Syria often identify sympathetic voices on Twitter and actively engage them publicly through tweets and then private direct messages, before
switching to encrypted smartphone apps for often lengthy efforts to turn subjects toward joining ISIS overseas or committing acts of violence here in the homeland, the report says, echoing previous comments to ABC News from U.S. officials.

**ABC News:** “The Cloudy Profile of American ISIS Suspects”, December 1, 2015

**AJAM:** “Unprecedented diversity of support of ISIL in US, study says”, December 1, 2015

By Michael Pizzi

A 19-year-old newlywed and former Mississippi State cheerleader. A Bosnian immigrant and war veteran. The son of a Boston area police officer. These are some of the 56 people arrested in the United States this year on charges of supporting or plotting with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) — the most terrorism-related arrests U.S. authorities have made in a single year since 2001.

That finding is part of a new study from researchers at George Washington University who examined legal documents tied to ISIL-related charges in the U.S. since March 2014. What they found was an unprecedented diversity of ages, backgrounds and locations among ISIL’s U.S.-based recruits — from the “keyboard warriors” who share the group’s propaganda online to those who actually take up arms in Syria and Iraq.

The information explains the challenge ISIL poses to traditional law enforcement protocols for violent radicalization, said Lorenzo Vidino, director of the Program on Extremism at GWU and an author of the report. “There’s absolutely no common profile,” Vidino said. “From teenagers to people in their 40s, people of extremely diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, men and women, Caucasian, Latino, African-American, Jewish — you name it.”

The findings, which drew from 7,000 pages of legal documents, reflect ISIL’s call for any disaffected Sunni Muslim or willing convert the world over to join its ranks. But researchers managed to paint a rough picture of who might be vulnerable to ISIL recruitment. According to the data, the average age of those
arrested is 26, which is younger than recruits to most likeminded groups — indicative of ISIL's social media prowess. The vast majority of recruits — 86 percent — are male. About 40 percent are converts to Islam, rather than raised Muslim. And, rather than immigrants or refugees, “these are people born and bred here,” Vidino said.

Other trends are harder to pin down, including the threat an individual may pose to the U.S. The vast majority of U.S.-based sympathizers are connected to the group or exposed to its ideology over social media, and the involvement of most pro-ISIL Americans stops there. The data further show that, among those arrested on ISIL-related charges, only 27 percent planned attacks on U.S. soil. And all appear to have been intercepted by law enforcement before they could do any harm.

About 50 percent of those arrested have made the leap to “actual militancy,” traveling or attempting to travel abroad and fight in places such as Syria and Iraq, the study found. A few may even have “reached midlevel leadership positions within the group.” However, the total number of Americans seeking to fight for the group has dropped markedly in recent months — an average of two Americans a month since July, compared to nine a month over the preceding year, according to U.S. officials.

That may or may not be good news. Counterterrorism officials have warned that ISIL may be shifting its strategy, encouraging “lone wolf” supporters in the West to stay at home and strike soft targets. Optimistic officials argue that is a consequence of the group’s slowing territorial gains in its heartland of Syria and Iraq. Nevertheless, fears of Al-Qaeda-style strikes abroad have escalated since ISIL carried out its deadliest-ever wave of attacks outside Syria and Iraq in a span of two weeks last month, striking Paris, Beirut and the Sinai Peninsula.

The GWU report reveals one critical strategy deployed by U.S. law enforcement in cracking down on ISIL recruits: informants. More than half the arrests in the study resulted from an investigation that used either an informant or an undercover law enforcement officer. It’s a tactic the FBI has widely employed in counterterrorism operations since 9/11, “with a remarkable conviction success rate,” according to researchers. It has also “caused friction” with communities that are frequently targeted in such stings, especially among U.S. Muslims.

“These tactics are indeed aggressive and can create a reaction with the Muslim community. That’s undeniable,” Vidino said. But the approach is often called for, he argued, because of “the nature of radicalization in the U.S., with a lot of
random recruits across the country that you can’t necessarily link to outside groups.”

The cases reviewed — those arrested by U.S. authorities — represent a small fraction of ISIL supporters, including a total of 250 Americans believed to have traveled or attempted to travel to fight for ISIL. There are at least 900 active investigations into alleged ISIL supporters nationwide, according to law enforcement agencies.

Still, those numbers pale in comparison with the alarming rate of ISIL recruitment in Western European countries, which have seen more than 5,000 of their citizens travel to Syria and Iraq to fight in those wars, usually for ISIL. Experts offer several explanations for the stark discrepancy. Above all, they point to certain pockets of disaffected, poorly integrated Muslim youths in places like Belgium, France and the U.K. that produce a disproportionate number of ISIL fighters.

In the U.S., “you don’t have those hotbeds that you see in Europe — neighborhoods or communities where peer-to-peer recruitment takes place,” said Ali Soufan, the CEO of the Soufan Group, a consultancy based in New York City. With a few exceptions, ISIL “hasn’t been able to find fertile grounds in American Muslim communities,” he said. This is, he explained, partly because U.S. Muslim communities are very diverse ethnically and in terms of religious sect, which inclines them towards integration. They’re also among the wealthiest and most educated Muslim communities in the world, he said.

Nevertheless, the GWU study suggests that ISIL will continue to attract a smattering of followers across the U.S. and that arrests are merely a stopgap measure. Countering ISIL’s messaging online will be essential, though what form that response takes is an open question. GWU researchers recommend incorporating willing American Muslims in counter-messaging, as well as encouraging disillusioned American fighters to return home and share their experiences living in the "caliphate" with would-be recruits.

But as they point out, “Because there is no standard recruit profile, there is also no silver bullet that will blunt [ISIL’s] allure.”
Alabama.com: “Alabama Woman one of 300 Americans using Social Media to recruit for ISIS”, December 1, 2015

By Leada Gore

ISIS sympathizers using social media to recruit new militants are in Alabama and every state, according to a new report that looks at terrorist infiltration in the U.S.

George Washington University’s Program on Extremism developed the report to determine how militants are using social media – especially Twitter – to foster sympathy and recruit new members. The study identified as many as 300 American or U.S.-based ISIS sympathizers who are using social media to connect and disseminate information.

The ISIS sympathizers are located in every state, the report shows. Their preferred social media is an ever-changing array of Twitter accounts, though they also use Facebook, Google+ and Tumblr, as well as messaging services and the dark web.

"The spectrum of U.S.-based sympathizers actual involvement with ISIS varies significantly, ranging from those who are merely inspired by its message to those few who reached mid-level leadership positions within the group," the study’s authors, Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes wrote.

In the wake of deadly attacks last month in Paris, authorities have been growing increasingly concerned about the threat to the homeland posed by Islamic militants or "lone wolves" who identify with ISIS. The Department of Homeland Security and the FBI has confirmed ISIS-related investigations are underway in Alabama and every U.S. state.

The latest report looks at social media accounts and legal cases against ISIS recruits. Based on the cases currently within the justice system, New York and Minnesota are the states with the most activity; other hot spots are California, Illinois and North Carolina. Texas, Ohio and Mississippi all report an increased level of activity. Alabama is on the low end of the spectrum, with no reported legal cases involving ISIS sympathizers.

That doesn’t mean they don’t exist in states like Alabama, however; it just means they aren’t in the court system.

George Washington University’s Program on Extremism
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@GWUPoE - https://cchs.gwu.edu/program-extremism
"The indictments are the tip of the iceberg," researchers said. So far this year, U.S. authorities have arrested almost 70 people for supporting or plotting with ISIS. That's the largest number of terrorism-related arrests in the county in a single year since September 2001. Social media is a big part of that communications, the researchers said.

"While some seek to join the self-declared caliphate in ISIS-controlled territory, others plan attacks within the U.S.," Vidino said. "It's a growing and disturbing phenomenon."

**Hoover girl's ISIS involvement**

The report showed the average age of an ISIS sympathizer is 26; 40 percent have converted to Islam; and 10 percent are women.

One of those female ISIS supporters is Hoda Muthana, a [Hoover teenager who left America to join ISIS](https://cchs.gwu.edu/program-extremism) in Syria and remains an active recruiter on Twitter. Muthana's case is one of the ones detailed in the report.

Muthana, a Yemeni-American, used Twitter to connect with other Islamic militants online before she left the U.S. It was online that she met Aqsa Mahmood, a 19-year old from Scotland who was one the first Western females to travel to Syria, researchers said. The two communicated frequently and Muthana modeled her departure from the U.S. to Syria via Turkey on Mahmood's.

Muthana later went to Syria where she married an Australian ISIS fighter, Suhan al Rahman, who has since been killed in an airstrike. Muthana, who now lives in Raqqa, Syria, remains active on Twitter, recently posting images of four burning passports with the message "Bonfire soon, no need for these anymore."

She and others like her use the social media messages to spread ISIS' message and lure others into their activities.

Her story is not that unusual for those who are seeking out ISIS, Vidino said. "We have seen cases in big cities and rural towns. The individuals involved range from hardened militants to teenage girls, petty criminals and college students," he added.
By Fred Lucas

Despite recent claims from President Barack Obama that the Islamic State isn’t gaining strength, a new report from George Washington University asserts the group has had an “unprecedented” rate of recruitment inside the United States.

The report was published less than three weeks following the Islamic State attack on Paris, after which Obama had told ABC News of the fight against the radical Islamic group, “I don’t think they’re gaining strength. What is true is that from the start our goal has been first to contain, and we have contained them.”

The GWU Program on Extremism report, “ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa” by professors Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, was released Tuesday and said that, since March 2014, 71 people linked to the Islamic State have been charged with terror-related activity in the U.S. — 56 of those arrests came in 2015.

“White not as large as in many other Western countries, ISIS-related mobilization in the United States has been unprecedented,” the GWU report says. “As of the fall of 2015, U.S. authorities speak of some 250 Americans who have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria/Iraq to join the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and 900 active investigations against ISIS sympathizers in all 50 states.”

The reference in the report’s title to Raqqa comes from an example given of Hoda Muthana, a young Yemeni-American woman from Hoover, Alabama, who became involved with extremists online before she moved to Raqqa, a city in Syria, and has been involved in sending online messages targeted to Americans. Among the messages she has sent include, “Veterans, Patriot, Memorial etc Day parades . . . go on drive by’s + spill all of their blood or rent a big truck n drive all over them. Kill them.”

Of those arrested, the average age is 26, while 86 percent are male, and activity has occurred in 21 states, the report found. A slim majority of those arrested had
attempted to travel abroad, while almost one third of those arrested were involved in plots to carry out attacks on U.S. soil.

The report says that a dozen Americans were killed in Islamic State-related activity abroad, while three were killed inside the United States.

“Some members of this online echo chamber eventually make the leap from keyboard warriors to actual militancy,” the report says.

It’s not just a social media problem, the report warns.

“While instances of purely web-driven, individual radicalization are numerous, in several cases U.S.-based individuals initially cultivated and later strengthened their interest in ISIS’s narrative through face-to-face relationships. In most cases online and offline dynamics complement one another,” the report says.


By Milton J. Valencia

So far this year, 56 people have been charged in the United States with crimes related to the Islamic State group — a record number of terrorism-related arrests in any year since the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks, according to a first-of-its-kind review released Tuesday.

In all, 71 individuals have been charged with activities related to ISIS since March 2014, according to the review by the George Washington University Program on Extremism.

The list includes David Wright and Nicholas Rovinski, the two local men who were arrested in June after allegedly conspiring to support ISIS by beheading anti-Islamic activist Pamela Geller. Their alleged coconspirator, Usamah Rahim, was shot and killed during a confrontation with Boston police. Another Massachusetts man charged with supporting the Islamic State is Alexander Ciccolo, the 23-year-old from Western Massachusetts who allegedly schemed to bomb a local university.

The report, called “ISIS in America,” also found that roughly 250 Americans have been identified as having traveled or attempted to travel to Syria and Iraq.
to join ISIS, and that there are 900 active investigations against Islamic State sympathizers in all 50 states.

Seamus Hughes, the deputy director of the Program on Extremism and one of the report’s authors, said in an interview that ISIS has proven to be a prolific recruiter, with much of its work conducted online through various social media platforms.

“The bar for Americans to join these terrorist organizations has been lowered, allowing a level of connectivity and interaction with recruiters and propagandists unheard of just a few years ago,” Hughes said.

He added, “There’s a fascinating dynamic going on online of American ISIS supporters, which I don’t think people totally grasp. We wanted to start a conversation about what this actually looks like, what the typical profile of an ISIS recruit in America looks like.”

According to the study, however, there is no exact profile.

Most of those charged were men, and their average age was 26. But the study found wide differences among them in terms of race, age, social class, education, and family background.

Hughes said the Islamic State’s diversity showed the success it has had in recruiting online.

“The demographics are all over the place,” Hughes said.

Edward Davis, Boston’s former police commissioner who now consults on security matters, said in an interview that the study shows that people from all backgrounds are being lured by ISIS’s propaganda. That included Rahim, of Roslindale, who allegedly lunged at police with a military-style knife, after plotting an Islamic State-inspired attack.

It also includes Ciccolo of Adams, the son of a Boston police captain, who has a history of mental illness and had become obsessed with Islam.

“I think that you have a combination of zealots who are dedicated to jihad, and then you have people with psychological problems and other issues that are causing them to lean towards this violent rhetoric, but the sum total is the same,” said Davis, who was not part of the study.

Davis said people tend to forget about thwarted attacks.
“The ISIS threat is real, and the point they have gotten people to go over the edge is a troubling development,” he said.


By Bob McGovern and Chris Villani

There have been hundreds of investigations into ISIS sympathizers in the United States during the past year, and 71 have been brought up on charges for activities that involve the murderous terrorist group, according to a new study.

“Publicly available information confirms a sharp surge of jihadist activities in the U.S., especially when compared to dynamics seen in the years since the wave of arrests following 9/11,” the report, compiled by the George Washington University Program on Extremism, reads.

Since January 2015, 56 individuals with links to ISIS have been arrested, according to the report. Included in that number are the cases of David Wright and Nicholas Rovinski, local men accused in a conspiracy to provide material support to ISIS, and Alexander Ciccolo, the son of a Boston police captain who stands accused of plotting to commit terrorist acts.

Usaamah Abdullah Rahim, of Roslindale, is also mentioned. Rahim was shot and killed by authorities after he charged them with a knife. He’s Wright’s cousin, and authorities say the duo was prepared to kill people in the name of ISIS with Rovinski’s help.

“It is apparent the U.S. is home to a small but active cadre of individuals infatuated with ISIS’s ideology, some of whom have decided to mobilize in its furtherance,” the report states.

According to the report, 21 states have had at least one arrest in connection with ISIS-related investigations. New York had the most cases with 13. Of those charged, 58 were American citizens, while six were permanent residents.

However, those facing charges “are merely the tip of the iceberg,” according to the report. Researchers discovered “a few dozen individuals with reported ISIS links who have not been charged.”
There is no specific threat against Massachusetts right now, state police Lt. Col. Francis Hughes said today.

“We are going to be vigilant with the way things are in the world,” he said. “We are regularly briefed by the JTTF (Joint Terrorism Task Force) and FBI on trends…but there is nothing specific right now that this state should be worried about.”

Hughes said troopers would be teaming up with local cops to provide security for holiday events in the state.

“Any kind of major event anywhere, be it the marathon or the Fourth of July celebration so any kind of Christmas festivities, we will be working with our local partners,” he said. “We take every kind of outside or inside event very seriously when we provide security for it.”

Hughes said the statewide intelligence center receives tips from around the world every day, which are then investigated to see if there is any connection to Massachusetts. He also called for the public’s help in spotting potential threats.

“We ask people to, if they see something, say something,” Hughes said. “That information is put into databases and we follow up with investigations. Every single threat we hear or that we get is followed up on, at some point, to see whether it is or is not a threat.”

George Washington researchers also found that there 300 U.S.-based ISIS sympathizers on social media in charge of recruiting and spreading propaganda.

“While American ISIS accounts are suspended with some frequency, these suspensions have become a badge of honor and a means by which an aspirant can bolster his or her legitimacy,” the report states.

“In most suspension cases, a new (and often more than one) account with a variation of the previous username is created within hours.”

Twitter is “the platform of choice” for American ISIS sympathizers to connect.

Business Insider Politics: “‘Unprecedented’, New Report Paints a Worrisome Picture of ISIS in America”, December 1, 2015²

By Pamela Engel

A new report out Tuesday paints a bleak picture of ISIS infiltration in the US. Researchers at the Center for Cyber and Homeland Security at George Washington University investigated the presence of American ISIS supporters on social media and found that "ISIS-related mobilization in the United States has been unprecedented."

US authorities are reportedly aware of 250 Americans who have attempted to travel to Islamic State territory — some successfully, others not — in Syria and Iraq. And there are 900 active investigations against ISIS supporters in all 50 states, according to the report.

Most ISIS sympathizers the center found are young — the average age is 26 — and 86% are male. More than half attempted to travel abroad, and 27% were involved in plots to carry out attacks in the US. Many were American-born and had no prior history of radical views.

Though much radicalization occurs online, the center also found evidence of face-to-face meetings of groups of like-minded people. About 40% of people studied were converts to Islam.

One person profiled in the report, a teenager named Nader Saadeh, lived in New Jersey and had a hand in radicalizing Munther Omar Saleh, another teenager from Queens, New York. He then pulled three others into his orbit, including his older brother, and the group started sharing ISIS propaganda.

The group planned to join ISIS until Saadeh was arrested by Jordanian authorities after traveling to Amman. The FBI arrested the remaining four of Saadeh's associates in the New York area.

There are also "keyboard warriors" who disseminate ISIS propaganda on Twitter and other social-media platforms while still living in the US.

Making the fight against ISIS even more difficult for American authorities is the fact that ISIS sympathizers in the US don't have a common profile.

"Ranging from grown men who had flirted with jihadist militancy for over a decade to teenagers who have only recently converted to Islam, from the son of a Boston area police officer to a single mother of two young children, these individuals differ widely in race, age, social class, education, and family..."
background," the report said. "Individuals with such diverse backgrounds are unlikely to be motivated by the same factors."

There is, however, one catalyst in particular that researchers found is common among many of those who become radicalized: the Syrian civil war. The report said:

In many cases examined by our research team, an underlying sense of sympathy and compassion appeared to play an important role in initially motivating young Americans to become interested and invested in the Syrian conflict. Many were outraged by the appalling violence Bashar al Assad’s regime used to suppress the Syrian rebellion and the subsequent inaction on the part of the international community. Pictures and videos capturing the aftermath of civilian massacres perpetrated by the regime, displayed widely in both social and mainstream media, rocked the consciences of many—from those with an existing strong Sunni identity to those who were not Muslim—and led some to take the first steps to militancy.

This fits with what other experts have said in the past — that atrocities committed by the Syrian regime against its people are one of the main recruiting tools of ISIS.


By Lucy Schouten

Al Qaeda has fallen to second place for popularity in the United States, as the Islamic State militant group has skillfully employed social media to appeal to a diverse group of sympathizers across all 50 states, according to a new report published Tuesday by George Washington University’s Program on Extremism.

The reach of Islamic State (IS) into the United States is as misunderstood as it is feared. But in the report, authors Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes compile what is known about all 71 suspects who have already been
identified with hope of informing efforts to combat the terrorist group's reach in America.

One major challenge to this effort is how diverse in background the confirmed radicals are. Mostly male, they range in age from 15 to 47 and are usually US citizens. Converts to Islam are overrepresented among those radicalized.

"Defying any cookie-cutter profile of the American ISIS supporter, these 71 individuals constitute an incredibly heterogeneous group," according to the report. "In fact, they come from an array of ethnic groups and a range of socio-economic and educational statuses."

Only 27 percent of these Americans were involved in plots for domestic terror attacks, and over half tried or succeeded in traveling abroad, according to a statement. This year has seen 56 people arrested for terrorism, the most arrested in a single year since 2001.

In an effort to understand the American radicals and better identify them going forward, the authors also analyzed the broader strategies employed for IS mobilization in America.

“In a democracy like ours, the expression of radical views is protected by the Constitution,” wrote former California Rep. Jane Harman in the report. “Violent action – inspired by those beliefs – is not. Our challenge is to identify the triggers for violence and intervene at just the right moment to prevent it.”

The authors suggested law enforcement begin using the stories of disillusioned former radicals against IS and prevent radicalization by partnering with those whose strategies could include more than arrests. It could mean moving from a strictly law enforcement-based model to something more academic or social, something that mirrors Islamic State strategy but with the opposite goal.

“The way things are heading, people are simply not open to the idea of creating some type of free space where people like myself would be allowed to engage with those who are flirting or sympathizing with radical Islam,” Yasir Qadhi, a leading Islamic scholar in the US and professor at Rhodes College, told The Christian Science Monitor.
Mr. Qadhi wants the US government to let him engage in counter-terrorism with at-risk Americans, using Islam to stop radicals before they engage in terrorism.


By Cliff Pinckard

A study released Tuesday warns that support for ISIS in the United States has reached "unprecedented" levels, saying that social media has played a major role in the radicalization and mobilization of American sympathizers.

Despite the warning, the study from researchers at George Washington University says support for ISIS in the U.S. is well-below that in other nations. (The full study, titled "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa", can be read below. Mobile users can read it here.)

The report says 250 Americans have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS this year, and 900 suspected ISIS sympathizers in all 50 states currently are under investigation.

Since March 2014, 71 people have faced ISIS-related charges, including 56 in 2015, the largest number of terrorism-related arrests since Sept. 11, 2001. In June, a Sheffield Lake man, Amir Said Abdul Rahman Al-Ghazi, 38, was arrested by the FBI and accused of supporting ISIS.

The wide profile of the suspects makes it difficult to analyze, the report says, although most are young (average age of 26) and male (86 percent).

"The individuals range from hardened militants to teenage girls, petty criminals and college students," Lorenzo Vidino, the director of the university's program on extremism, tells the New York Times. "The diversity is staggering."

The report says social media, particularly Twitter, is used extensively to spread propaganda.

"Some members of this online echo chamber eventually make the leap from keyboard warriors to actual militancy," the report states.
The report offers ideas on countering ISIS' influence in the U.S., including increasing funding to create dynamic programs; helping non–law enforcement groups take people off the path to radicalization; and encouraging American Muslims to engage with ISIS supporters without fear of becoming a target of a federal inquiry, NPR reports.


By Penny Starr

(CNSNews.com) – A new report by George Washington University’s Program on Extremism reveals that federal and state law enforcement agencies have arrested 71 individuals on ISIS-related charges since March of 2014 – 56 of those in 2015 alone, making it the most terror-related arrests in one year since Sept. 11, 2001.

The “vast majority” of those individuals are U.S. citizens or permanent residents, according to the report.

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, emerged in those two countries as part of an effort by the terrorist group to establish a caliphate, or Islamic state, and now it threatens other countries in Europe and elsewhere. The most recent attack killed more than 100 people in Paris, France last month.

The study also revealed these facts about those arrested:

• The average age is 26.
• 86 percent are male.
• Activities took place in 21 states.
• 51 percent traveled or attempted to travel abroad.
• 27 percent were involved in plots to carry out attacks on U.S. soil.
• 55 percent were arrested in an operation involving an informant and/or an undercover agent.
The report also found that “profiles of individuals involved in ISIS-related activities in the U.S. differ widely in race, age, social class, education, and family background.”

“The youngest U.S. person arrested for ISIS-related activities was an unnamed 15-year-old boy,” the report said. “Two others were minors, ages 16 and 17 at the time of their arrests.

“The oldest was Tairod Pugh, a former Air Force officer who was 47 at the time of his arrest,” the report said.

The introduction of the report, entitled "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," featured 22-year-old Mohammed Oda Dakhlalla and his 19-year-old wife, Jaelyn Delshaun Young.

Both were attending the University of Mississippi but leading a double life as they planned to travel to Syria to join ISIS. The FBI arrested the couple at a small regional airport in Mississippi on Aug. 8, 2015.

The couple was charged with “attempting and conspiring to provide material support and resources to a designated foreign terrorist organization,” the report stated.

“The individuals range from hardened militants to teenage girls, petty criminals and college students,” Lorenzo Vidino, director of the university’s program on extremism, told the New York Times. “The diversity is staggering.”

Social media is playing a major role in radicalizing individuals, in particular Twitter, although face-to-face relationships also play a role, the study found.


In October 2014 three Colorado girls skipped school and made their way to the airport. With passports and $2,000 between them, they boarded a flight bound for Frankfurt. After a layover in Germany, they would land in Istanbul before crossing Turkey’s border with Syria and entering the Islamic State.
The girls never got that far after their parents alerted authorities, who apprehended them in Frankfurt. The girls, ages 15, 16, and 17, were returned home to their families in Colorado and faced no criminal charges for their alleged attempt to join the Islamic State.

They are among dozens of Americans with alleged links to ISIS who are known to federal authorities but have not been arrested, according to a new report released by George Washington University’s Program on Extremism. The report says 900 investigations remain open, about 250 people believed to have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria, and less than 80 have been charged.

“You arrest those believed to pose an imminent threat to themselves and others, build legal cases against those you can, and the ones you can’t yet because of variety of reasons, you monitor as best as possible with admittedly stretched law enforcement resources,” Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the project, told The Daily Beast.

“As we’ve seen from the wide range of legal charges, prosecutors have had to get creative,” Hughes added. “It’s hard to truly know without the complete picture, but from conversations with law enforcement around the country, those not charged tend to be younger. There’s a number of legal and policy reasons for that.”

Like the Aurora, Colorado, girls, like two teenage siblings from Minneapolis who allegedly tried to go to Syria with their 19-year-old brother have not been charged. Their brother, Mohammed Hamzah Khan, pleaded guilty to attempting to provide material support to a terrorist organization.

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The official added that the Aurora girls told authorities that they weren’t heading off to fight, after they were apprehended—instead they were “interested in looking around and seeing what that’s all about.”

“So you don’t have intent to take up arms against the government, you don’t have adults, so you’re kind of, from a law enforcement standpoint, you’re kind of in a corner,” he said. The parents “were pretty direct in saying that their kids were rescued.”

Instead of arresting and charging every alleged ISIS recruit, sometimes law enforcement tries to dissuade these young people—particularly women—from their beliefs.

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The Daily Caller: “ISIS Radicalization and Recruitment in Booming in the United States”, December 1, 2015

By Jonah Bennett

Islamic State-related radicalization is booming in the United States, and the group’s recruitment tactics are far more successful than traditional jihadi movements.
A new George Washington University report looks at the demographics of ISIS supporters in the United States and the technology the terror group uses to galvanize its members.

“While jihadist causes have lured American recruits for several decades, the surge spurred by the rise of ISIS and its sophisticated marketing of its counter-culture to impressionable Americans is unprecedented,” the report authored by Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes says.

The report notes authorities opened 900 investigations in all 50 states against Americans who sympathize with ISIS. According to an FBI estimate, there are potentially thousands of individuals living in the U.S. who support ISIS, the vast majority of whom are permanent residents or U.S. citizens.

Results from active investigations and run-ins with U.S. authorities reveal some interesting demographic trends. Since March 2014, 71 have been charged with ISIS-related activities.

First, the average age of those charged for ISIS-related activities is 26. The individuals are spread across 21 different states, and 86 percent are male.

New York and Minnesota rank first and second respectively for the highest number of arrests. Minnesota has a strong reputation as an incubator of radical Islam. Mohamud Noor, acting executive director for the Confederation of Somali Communities in Minnesota, tells The New York Daily News that, “They are young men who are looking and looking for their identity.”

Just over 50 percent tried to travel to Syria or Iraq in order to fight for ISIS.

Additionally, 27 percent planned to carry out attacks in the U.S.

A total of 55 percent were nabbed by undercover operatives or informants, and 40 percent of those arrested are converts to Islam, indicating a clear overrepresentation.

By far, ISIS sympathizers use Twitter the most out of any other social media platform, followed by Facebook and Tumblr. Encrypted messaging services like Telegram also feature heavily, though after the Paris attacks Telegram shut down 78 channels in use by the group.

In other cases, individuals embrace ISIS ideology because of radicalization in existing in-person social circles.
Other demographic traits vary widely. The report notes that, “Their motivations are equally diverse and deny easy analysis.” This means there is no simple solution, the authors argue.

“Recognizing this complexity is a vital initial step for policymakers, law enforcement officials, civic leaders, teachers and parents when crafting effective solutions,” the report states.

One of those solutions includes finding recruits who are totally disillusioned with ISIS ideology and promoting their message, but it also may include granting a certain amount of immunity for foreign fighters who wish to return home. The government should then seize on the fighters’ disillusionment and use their messages as a counter-ISIS propaganda tool, as traditional methods appear largely ineffective.


By Stepehen Rex Brown

It's the Empire State of terror.

The dangerous wave of ISIS supporters in America includes college students, teenage girls, militants and surpassing all other state residents — New Yorkers.

An alarming study released Tuesday by George Washington University shows U.S. authorities have made 71 ISIS-related arrests since March 2014 — 56 of them this year. The 2015 total represents the largest number of terrorism arrests since 2001.

Of the arrests tied to the bloodthirsty Islamic State, 13 occurred in New York — the most of any state, followed by Minnesota with 11.

The emerging profile of the ISIS sympathizers shows they’re younger — the average age is 26. About 86% of those arrested are male. The youngest was an unidentified 15-year-old boy, two were 16 and 17 when they were busted and the oldest was 47. The majority were U.S. residents.
U.S. officials, according to the report, “ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa,” have documented at least 250 Americans who traveled or tried to travel to Iraq or Syria with the intent of joining ISIS.

“Because there is no standard recruit profile, there is also no silver bullet that will blunt ISIS’s allure,” the report authors, Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, wrote.

Among those profiled in the report is Nader Saadeh, a New Jersey man of Jordanian and Palestinian descent who was busted by authorities in Amman, the Jordanian capital. He was allegedly on his way to join ISIS. Saadeh, 20, was charged in August with plotting to support a terror group.

He was part of a cluster of five jihadists targeted by New York officials. The group first connected in November 2012 and by 2014 was made up of five young men who lived in Queens, Staten Island and New Jersey, according to the report.

“The five spent their days absorbing, discussing, and sharing ISIS propaganda — both online and in the physical world,” the report says. “The FBI, which had the group under surveillance for months, listened in as the young men discussed building a ‘small army’ and traveling to the Middle East.”

Before being busted Saadeh allegedly chatted about jihad with Munther Omar Saleh, a student at Vaughn College of Aeronautics and Technology in Queens. Saleh is charged with discussing how to build a pressure cooker bomb and plotting to travel to the Middle East to join ISIS.

His friend, Fareed Mumuni, 21, is charged with lunging at FBI agents with a kitchen knife when they inspected his Staten Island home in June. Other members of the group are charged with providing material support to ISIS.

The findings by George Washington University researchers were a result of an analysis of legal documents and social media posts by at least 300 American ISIS sympathizers. There are about 900 open FBI investigations with ties to the Islamic State.

**Daily Mail**: “**ISIS has 300 American ambassadors spreading propaganda and trying to recruit would-be terrorists on Twitter – and many are women**, December 1, 2015

By Willis Robinson
At least 300 Americans are acting as ISIS ambassadors on social media by spreading propaganda and trying to recruit would-be terrorists.

A report by George Washington University found the group of militant sympathizers, a third of whom are women, use Twitter to spread their evil ideology or communicate with other extremists.

Their discussions range from benign banter to talk of gruesome attacks that would lead to mass casualties.

Muslim leaders from the West who condemn ISIS are referred to as 'coconuts', while academics and scholars are routinely given death threats.

When their accounts get suspended it is seen as a 'badge of honor' and a sign their intentions are legitimate, and a new one replaces it just hours later.

They are then retweeted to attract more followers.

Their use of platforms like Facebook, Google+, and Tumblr to more discrete messaging applications such as Kik, Telegram, surespot, and the dark web, has created what has been described as a 'radicalization echo chamber'.

While American ISIS supporters tend to be male, nearly one third of the accounts examined are purportedly operated by women, the report states.

The account holders are broadly divided into two sets: those who locate themselves in Syria and Iraq and those still in America but aspiring to assist ISIS in a number of ways.

Those in the former group often maintain their network of friends in the U.S. after arriving in ISIS territory.

They post near real-time updates of ISIS-led attacks and life in the caliphate, encouraging fellow Americans to make the trek.

The users also scold their real-world and online friends for their lack of commitment to the cause.

A significant number of American ISIS supporters use avatars of black flags, lions, and green birds.
One account of an ambassador uses a picture of the Detroit Lions, combining a distinctly American pride in an NFL team and the popular Islamic symbol of bravery very frequently used by ISIS supporters.

Images, quotes, and links to lectures of the deceased radical cleric Anwar al Awlaki are favorites of the American ISIS scene.

Increasingly photos of other Americans who have been arrested on terrorism charges, killed waging jihad abroad, or responsible for homegrown terrorist attacks are used as avatars.

On occasion, American ISIS supporters exploit hashtags related to U.S. policies and political movements.

For example, some tried to use the #BlackLivesMatter conversation in an attempt to bolster their support among African American Muslims and spread their propaganda to unsuspecting Americans of all backgrounds.

They did this to capitalize on unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore, trying to tailor their U.S.-targeted propaganda to resonate with segments of the African American community.

The report reads: ‘The spectrum of U.S.-based sympathizers' actual involvement with ISIS varies significantly, ranging from those who are merely inspired by its message to those few who reached mid-level leadership positions within the group.

‘Ranging from grown men who had flirted with jihadist militancy for over a decade to teenagers who have only recently converted to Islam, from the son of a Boston area police officer to a single mother of two young children, these individuals differ widely in race, age, social class, education, and family background.

‘In many cases examined by our research team, an underlying sense of sympathy and compassion appeared to play an important role in initially motivating young Americans to become interested and invested in the Syrian conflict. Many were outraged by the appalling violence Bashar al Assad’s regime used to suppress the Syrian rebellion and the subsequent inaction on the part of the international community.

‘Pictures and videos capturing the aftermath of civilian massacres perpetrated by the regime, displayed widely in both social and mainstream media, rocked the
consciences of many - from those with an existing strong Sunni identity to those who were not Muslim - and led some to take the first steps to militancy.'

A 2009 report by King's College, London, said the internet 'provides a comparatively risk-free way for potential recruits to find like-minded individuals and network amongst them, enabling them to reach beyond an isolated core group of conspirators.

'It creates a new social environment in which otherwise unacceptable views and behaviour are normalised. Surrounded by other radicals, the Internet becomes a virtual 'echo chamber' in which the most extreme ideas and suggestions receive the most encouragement and support.'

The Dallas Morning News: “Surge Reported in ISIS-related Arrests in U.S.”, December 1, 2015

WASHINGTON — Authorities this year have arrested nearly five dozen people in the U.S. for helping to support or plot with the Islamic State, according to a new study, the largest number of terrorism-related arrests in the country in a single year since September 2001.

The Islamic State recruits defy any single profile, the study found, though they are younger than previous terrorism suspects, are drawn heavily from converts to Islam and reflect increasingly prominent roles for women.

A demographic snapshot of the 71 people arrested on charges related to the Islamic State since March 2014, including 56 this year, emerged from a comprehensive review of social media accounts and legal documents of nearly 400 U.S. sympathizers of the Islamic State conducted by researchers at George Washington University.

Of the 71 arrests, New York had the most, 13, followed by Minnesota, which had 11. Three of the arrests were in Texas.

The volume and diversity of those arrested underscore the growing challenge the FBI and local law enforcement agencies face in trying to identify, monitor
and, if necessary, apprehend suspects at a time when the Islamic State has sharply increased its appeal to Westerners through Twitter, Facebook and other social media networks.

“The individuals range from hardened militants to teenage girls, petty criminals and college students,” said Lorenzo Vidino, the director of the university’s program on extremism, which conducted the study. “The diversity is staggering.”

The report, “ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa,” was made public Tuesday.

Even before the recent attacks in Paris, at least three dozen people in the U.S. suspected of ties to the Islamic State were under heavy electronic or physical surveillance, according to U.S. officials. Those under investigation typically have little terrorism expertise or support from a cell, making it even more difficult for the authorities to predict or detect who might carry out a strike.

“For law enforcement, it’s extremely difficult to determine who makes a big leap from keyboard jihadist to doing something,” said Vidino, who has studied Islamism for 15 years.

The people in the George Washington University study ranged from a 15-year-old boy to Tairod Pugh, a former Air Force officer who was 47 at the time of his arrest. The average age of the American supporter of the Islamic State was 26, the report found, reflecting a pattern unfolding in other Western countries as social media attracts younger recruits.

John Carlin, the assistant attorney general for national security, has said that of the terrorism-related arrests in the last 18 months, mostly involving the Islamic State, 80 percent of those arrested were younger than 30, and 40 percent were younger than 21.

According to the study, about 14 percent of those arrested were women, and the vast majority were American citizens or permanent residents, emphasizing the threat the authorities are combating from homegrown recruits, compared with foreigners infiltrating the country.

Forty percent of those arrested were converts to Islam, a larger representation among U.S. supporters of the Islamic State than the 23 percent of American Muslims overall who are converts, according to the study.
Slightly more than half of those arrested had tried to travel abroad, probably to Iraq or Syria, or were arrested during their travels to conflict zones, the report said. At least seven Americans have died fighting with the Islamic State in Iraq or Syria.

But U.S. authorities have recently detected a trend that they believe shows the effect of the group’s new message to stay at home and carry out attacks there: a significant drop in the number of Americans found to have gone to Syria and Iraq to join the group.

Counterterrorism officials say that since July, an average of two Americans a month have tried to travel or successfully traveled to Islamic State territory, compared with nine a month over the previous year.

More than half of those charged were arrested in an operation involving an informant or an undercover agent, the report said, a tactic that has caused tensions between the FBI and some American Muslims.

The Guardian: “‘American ISIS Twitter Scene’ Reveals Social Media’s Power to Radicalize”, December 1, 2015

By David Smith

Islamic State sympathisers in America prefer Twitter to any other social media platform and use avatars of black flags, green birds and lions – including the Detroit Lions NFL team – in their online propaganda, a study has shown.

Having a Twitter account suspended has become a “badge of honour” among US-based Isis supporters, researchers found, and they are adopting increasingly sophisticated techniques to circumvent the authorities in a “never-ending cat-and-mouse game”.

The report, Isis in America: From Retweets to Raqqa, published on Tuesday by George Washington University’s programme on extremism, analysed the social media accounts and legal documents of nearly 400 American followers of Isis. It found that 14% are female, the average age is 26, two in five are Muslim converts and more than half have travelled or attempted to travel abroad.
It also pointed to a thriving “American Isis Twitter scene”. During the six-month study, researchers monitored almost 300 accounts. The activity showed how social media plays a crucial role in their radicalisation and, at times, mobilisation to fight in Iraq and Syria.

Among the examples are newlywed couple Mohammad Oda Dakhlla, 22, and his 19-year-old wife Jaelyn Delshaun Young. Dakhlla, the son of a local imam, was about to start graduate school while Young, a police officer’s daughter and former school cheerleader, was studying chemistry. The couple lived a parallel life and planned a secret honeymoon: traveling to Syria to join Isis. In the early months of this year their radical musings on Twitter attracted the attention of the FBI, leading to their arrest at a small airport.

““It is an internet community with different roles and personalities, just like you have a community of Justin Bieber fans,” said Lorenzo Vidino, co-author of the report. “They’re getting better and better at it and there’s much more coordination than we thought. They get trolled so they have a list where the handles of trolls are shared.”

US authorities have estimated that several thousand Americans consume Isis propaganda online, the report notes. “American Isis activists and sympathisers are active on a variety of platforms, from open forums like Facebook, Google+ and Tumblr to more discreet messaging applications such as Kik, Telegram, surespot and the dark web. But Twitter is by far the platform of choice of this informal echo chamber.”

According to the study, a significant number of American Isis supporters use avatars of black flags, lions, and green birds – a scriptural reference from a hadith, or reported saying from the prophet Mohammad, that celebrates the virtues of martyrdom; jihadists term fallen comrades “green birds” to eulogise them as pious, faithful Muslims.

“A particularly clever account uses a picture of the Detroit Lions, combining a distinctly American pride in an NFL team and the popular Islamic symbol of bravery very frequently used by Isis supporters. Images, quotes and links to lectures of the deceased radical cleric Anwar al-Awlaki are favourites of the American Isis scene. Increasingly, photos of other Americans who have been arrested on terrorism charges, killed waging jihad abroad or were responsible for homegrown terrorist attacks are used as avatars.”
The study divides Isis supporters on Twitter into three categories: the “nodes” are the leading voices and generators of primary content, the “amplifiers” retweet material (it can be unclear whether they are real people or automated) and the “shout-outs” promote newly created accounts of suspended users.

“Shout-out accounts are a unique innovation and vital to the survival of the Isis online scene,” the report says. “They primarily introduce new, pro-Isis accounts to the community and promote newly created accounts of previously suspended users, allowing them to quickly regain their pre-suspension status. Although they tweet little substantive content, shout-out accounts tend to have the largest followings in the Twitter landscape and therefore play a pivotal role in the resilience of Isis’s Twitter community.”

Isis accounts are frequently suspended, but these have become “a badge of honour and a means by which an aspirant can bolster his or her legitimacy. In most suspension cases, a new (and often more than one) account with a variation of the previous username is created within hours.

“As American Isis supporters are continuously suspended from Twitter, creating a new account becomes increasingly difficult, leading some to turn to others for assistance. The user’s first tweet is often an image of the Twitter notification of suspension, proving that they are the owner of the previous account, along with a request for shout-outs. The new accounts are then retweeted by others, allowing the user to regain his or her previous online following.”

Vidino said on Monday the landscape is rapidly evolving and, even in the month and a half since his report was completed, there has been a shift away from Twitter towards platforms such as Instagram, Google+ and Snapchat. “It gives us a good snapshot,” he said of the report. “There’s no pretence it’s a perfect picture without flaws.”

As other studies have shown, most Isis followers in the US are American citizens – and young. Vidino added: “They are kids of their generation playing with avatars. Some change pictures almost on a daily basis. These are very suburban, normal American culture kind of kids with an Isis sympathy. It’s a hybrid identity.”

A spokesperson for Twitter declined to comment but pointed to its existing policies, including: “Users may not make threats of violence or promote violence, including threatening or promoting terrorism.”
By Robin Eberhardt

GW’s program on extremism released a study examining why Americans join the Islamic State Tuesday, the first comprehensive study of its kind.

The report, “ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa,” analyzes the demographics and possible motivations behind Americans forming ties and attempting to join ranks with ISIS. The report was written by Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, the leaders of the program, which launched earlier this year.

By examining at legal documents and interviewing prosecutors and people involved with the 71 Americans who were arrested for their attempted affiliation with ISIS, the authors of the study came up with the following conclusions about the American ISIS sympathizers.

The average American ISIS sympathizer

The report found that the average age of Americans arrested for at least attempting to join ISIS is 26 years old and more than 80 percent of them are male. The vast majority are U.S. citizens or permanent residences and a little more than half of those arrested at least attempted to travel abroad.

Officers have arrested the people for terrorist activity in 21 states, but the FBI has said that there are ISIS investigations in all 50 states, according to the report. The report also indicates that more than half of those arrested for ISIS terrorism were caught by an informant or through undercover agents.

Around 40 percent of those arrested were converts to Islam, the report states.

Varying demographics

The people arrested come from different ethnic groups, educational levels and socioeconomic statuses, the report shows. The report also states that the sympathizers can turn to radicalism for a range of diverse reasons and are often be drawn to extremism for more than one reason.

The report lists categories for possible motivations for an American to turn to ISIS: revenge seekers, status seekers, identity seekers and thrill seekers.
“Their motivations are equally diverse and defy easy analysis,” the report reads. Social media is ‘crucial.’

The study found at least 300 Americans who utilized social media to voice their sympathies with the Islamic State, with some of the people also taking action to physically travel abroad to further the ISIS mission in person. The most common form of social media considered was Twitter.

The report cites FBI Director James Comey in a statement from July on how ISIS uses social media for recruitment, saying that social media has given the terrorist group access to potential sympathizers that wasn’t as available in the past.

“The foreign terrorist now has direct access into the United States like never before,” Comey said in the report.


By Kristina Wong

THE TOPLINE: Pentagon chief Ash Carter announced Tuesday that the U.S. military would deploy a "specialized expeditionary task force" that would eventually conduct raids in Iraq and Syria against the Islamic State.

"These special operators will over time be able to conduct raids, free hostages, gather intelligence, and capture ISIL leaders," Carter told the House Armed Services Committee, using an alternative acronym for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

"That creates a virtuous cycle of better intelligence, which generates more targets, more raids and more momentum," Carter said.

Raids in Iraq would be at the request of the Iraqi government, but they could also take place in Syria.

"That's a force that wouldn't be on the ground all the time in Syria. It would go in, conduct raids, and go out," Carter added.

The new force would be compromised of U.S. special operators only, or with local partners, such as Kurdish Peshmerga, Carter said.
The U.S. currently has about 3,500 U.S. troops in Iraq and fewer than 50 special operations forces in Syria, according to defense officials.

The new targeting force is just one way the Pentagon is intensifying military efforts against ISIS in recent weeks.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and a foreign policy critic of the administration, called the deployment a "belated step forward."

"Today's announcement is yet another reactive and incremental step, specifically responding to the Paris attacks, in a policy that has allowed the ISIL threat to metastasize to Libya, Afghanistan, and elsewhere across the globe," McCain said.

But Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) said sending more forces "is a mistake."

"Though tempting to try to make up the inadequacies of local forces with superior U.S. personnel, the slow build-up of U.S. combat soldiers inside Syria and Iraq risks repeating the mistake of the Iraq War -- believing that extremism can be defeated by U.S. troops absent local political and military capacity," he said in a statement.

JOINT CHIEFS CHAIRMAN: ISIS ‘NOT CONTAINED’: The United States has "not contained" the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the nation's top military officer said Tuesday, contradicting President Obama's remarks last month about the terror group.

"We have not contained" ISIS, Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford told lawmakers at a House Armed Services Committee hearing. It was his second hearing since becoming chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in September.

The comment runs counter to what the president said days before ISIS launched a string of attacks across Paris.

"I don’t think they’re gaining strength," Obama had said to ABC News. "What is true is that from the start, our goal has been first to contain, and we have contained them."

Ben Rhodes, deputy national security adviser for strategic communication, later said the president's remarks applied specifically to Iraq and Syria.
Dunford said ISIS has been "tactically" contained in areas they have been in since 2010 but added, "strategically they have spread since 2010."

His remarks were in response to questioning by Rep. Randy Forbes (R-Va.) on whether ISIS has been contained at any time since 2010.

Dunford added that ISIS posed a threat beyond Iraq and Syria to countries such as Egypt, Nigeria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon and Jordan.

ANALYSIS SHOWS ‘UNPRECEDENTED’ US SUPPORT FOR ISIS: An academic report released Tuesday said that American support for radical Islamism has reached "unprecedented" levels.

"What we do see in the United States is an unprecedented mobilization" that is "bigger than any other mobilization we have seen since 9/11," Lorenzo Vidino, the director of George Washington University’s program on extremism, said during an event releasing the report.

The report found that the types of Americans drawn to ISIS vary widely in terms of race, age, education and family background. Yet they are largely all united by their use of social media, which ISIS has been able to master as its reach has grown.

FBI Director James Comey has said that federal officials have launched ISIS-related investigations in all 50 states.

Obama, who is in Paris for talks on an international climate change agreement, has also used the trip to meet with world leaders about the threat from ISIS.

FIGHT OVER SYRIAN REFUGEES: Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Tuesday that a battle over taking in Syrian refugees will probably find its way into government funding legislation currently being considered.

"I think the refugee issue is likely to be dealt with in some way in the omnibus," the Kentucky Republican told reporters when asked if the House-passed bill halting incoming refugees or changes to the Visa Waiver Program could be included in the spending bill.

The potential move comes after Senate Democrats threatened to block the chamber from taking up a House-passed bill that would require the administration to certify that Syrian and Iraqi refugees aren’t a threat to national security.
The move could complicate a Republican pledge to avoid a government shutdown ahead of the Dec. 11 deadline to pass pending legislation. While the push to "pause" the acceptance of refugees in the wake of the Paris attacks gained the support of dozens of House Democrats, it's largely divided lawmakers along partisan lines in the upper chamber.

Meanwhile, Sens. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) on Tuesday introduced legislation that would add new security measures for foreign travelers coming to the United States through a special tourist program.

The bill is seen as an attempt to move away from the House's efforts to block the Obama administration's plans for Syrian refugees, and offer a window of compromise to shore up U.S. defenses following the terrorist attacks across Paris last month.

NATO TO KEEP 12K TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN: NATO leaders have agreed to keep 12,000 troops in Afghanistan through 2016 to support the U.S.-led mission there, the alliance announced Tuesday.

The decision comes after President Obama announced in October that the United States would keep 9,800 U.S. troops there for most of 2016 before drawing down to 5,500 the following year.

Combat operations officially ended in 2014, though U.S. and NATO troops remain in the country to train and advise Afghan military forces.

The announcement on Afghanistan came during a meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels. The ministers are also expected to discuss issues facing NATO, including Turkey's downing of a Russian fighter jet it said violated its airspace, as well as Russia's incursion into Ukraine.

"The security environment in which we meet today is dark," NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said Tuesday at a press conference to start the meeting. "Terrorist attacks, violent instability, the breach of international rules. These are serious challenges from many different directions. And NATO is responding."

The Hill: “Joint Chiefs chairman: ‘We have not contained’ ISIS”, December 1, 2015
By Kristina Wong

The United States has "not contained" the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the nation's top military officer said Tuesday, contradicting President Obama's remarks last month about the terror group.

"We have not contained" ISIS, Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told lawmakers at a House Armed Services Committee hearing.

The comment runs counter to what the president said days before ISIS launched a string of attacks across Paris.

"I don’t think they’re gaining strength. What is true is that from the start, our goal has been first to contain, and we have contained them," Obama told ABC News.

Ben Rhodes, deputy national security adviser for strategic communication, later said the president’s remarks applied specifically to Iraq and Syria.

Dunford said ISIS has been "tactically" contained in areas they have been since 2010 but added, "Strategically they have spread since 2010."

His remarks were in response to questioning by Rep. Randy Forbes (R-Va.) on whether ISIS has been contained at any time since 2010.

Dunford added that ISIS posed a threat beyond Iraq and Syria to countries such as Egypt, Nigeria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon and Jordan.

Forbes also got Dunford to disagree with Defense Secretary Ash Carter, who testified alongside him.

Carter had declared during his opening statement that "we're at war" with ISIS.

Forbes pressed Dunford whether the U.S. was at war with ISIS, and who declared that war.

"We are technically not at war," Dunford replied.

An academic report released Tuesday said that American support for radical Islamism has reached "unprecedented" levels.

“What we do see in the United States is an unprecedented mobilization” that is “bigger than any other mobilization we have seen since 9/11,” Lorenzo Vidino,
the director of George Washington University’s program on extremism, said during an event releasing the report.

The report found that the types of Americans drawn to ISIS vary widely in terms of race, age, education and family background. Yet they are largely all united by their use of social media, which ISIS has been able to master as its reach has grown.

FBI Director James Comey has said that federal officials have launched ISIS-related investigations in all 50 states.

Obama, who is in Paris for talks on an international climate change agreement, has also used the trip to meet with world leaders about the threat from ISIS.


By Julian Hattem

Academic experts fear that American support for radical Islamism has reached “unprecedented” levels, even while it stays well below the support for the extremists seen in other countries.

Academics at George Washington University’s program on extremism found that the types of Americans drawn to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) vary widely in terms of race, age, education and family background. Yet they are largely all united by their use of social media, which ISIS has been able to master as its reach has grown.

“What we do see in the United States is an unprecedented mobilization” that is “bigger than any other mobilization we have seen since 9/11,” said Lorenzo Vidino, the director of the university’s program, said during an event releasing the report on Tuesday.

“It is not as big as some of the European countries that have been affected by the phenomenon,” he added. “But it is, in a historical sense, unprecedented.”

The findings are likely to add new urgency to officials’ concerns about ISIS, which have peaked in the weeks following attacks in Paris that killed 130 people. The Paris violence came on the heels of bombings in Beirut and the downing of
a Russian airliner over the Sinai Peninsula, a troubling sign of ISIS’s expansion beyond its self-proclaimed caliphate.

Intelligence and law enforcement officials have repeatedly warned that ISIS’s fluency on the Internet has made it attractive to disaffected Americans who grow radicalized online.

Critics of the Obama administration’s increasing focus on extremists online say that federal officials arrest people who would be unable to carry out plots on their own.

FBI Director James Comey has previously said that federal officials have launched ISIS-related investigations in all 50 states.

According to the GWU data, 71 Americans have been arrested for crimes linked to the extremist group since March 2014. Of those, 86 percent were male, 27 percent were involved in plots to launch attacks on U.S. soil and the average age was 26. Roughly half attempted to travel abroad or succeeded in doing so, and the vast majority were U.S. citizens or permanent residents. More than half were arrested in a sting operation involving an undercover agent or an informant.

“The spectrum of U.S.-based sympathizers’ actual involvement with ISIS varies significantly, ranging from those who are merely inspired by its message to those few who reached mid-level leadership positions within the group,” the report claimed.

Analysts reviewed more than 7,000 pages of legal documents related to the 71 people charged with a crime, as well as nearly 300 Twitter accounts of Americans who support ISIS.


By Adam Lidgett

More than 200 U.S. citizens have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria or Iraq to join the so-called Islamic State group, U.S. authorities said, according to a
new report. Just weeks after the deadly Paris terror attacks, for which the terrorist organization claimed responsibility, the report said ISIS mobilization in the U.S. is "unprecedented."

The report, from George Washington University’s Program on Extremism, is titled "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," using another name for the group. The report states about 250 Americans have tried to make the trip to the Middle East to join ISIS and that across all U.S. states, authorities are actively looking into supporters of the terror group. Since March 2014, 71 U.S. citizens have been charged with activities related to ISIS.

Most of the people charged are young -- the average age is 26 -- and more than 85 percent are male. Some 27 percent of those charged were allegedly involved in attack plots on the United States, according to the report, which also noted that social media plays an important role in radicalizing U.S. ISIS sympathizers. However, mobilization is not limited to the Internet, as many of the sympathizers have been radicalized through person-to-person relationships, the report noted.

“The spectrum of U.S.-based sympathizers’ actual involvement with ISIS varies significantly, ranging from those who are merely inspired by its message to those few who reached midlevel leadership positions within the group,” the report’s authors wrote.

In November, the U.S. Department of Justice arrested Terrence McNeil for soliciting the murder of U.S. military personnel. McNeil, who allegedly supported ISIS numerous times on social media, was accused of posting names of military members online and calling on others to carry out their murders, the department said. However, the report’s authors said many people who have expressed support for ISIS will most likely not take to militant action.

“The diversity of ISIS’ American recruits and the wide range of ways they demonstrate their support requires careful consideration prior to any potential policy response,” the report said. “Because there is no standard recruit profile, there is also no silver bullet that will blunt ISIS’ allure.”

Homeland Security: The Obama administration demands that Turkey secure its Syrian border to stop ISIS operatives from reaching Europe. Meanwhile, an academic study finds the U.S. swarming with ISIS.

George Washington University's Program on Extremism, in a report published Tuesday, found "unprecedented" ISIS mobilization within the U.S., "bigger than any other mobilization we have seen since 9/11."

So much for Obama’s "jayvee" squad.

"ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa" warns of "some 250 Americans who have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria/Iraq to join the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and 900 active investigations against ISIS sympathizers in all 50 states."

Of 71 charged with ISIS-related offenses, "56 have been arrested in 2015 alone, a record number of terrorism-related arrests for any year since 9/11."

And the next time your grandmother is subjected to a TSA pat-down, keep this in mind: "Of those charged: The average age is 26" and "86% are male." Just over half "traveled or attempted to travel abroad," while "27% were involved in plots to carry out attacks on U.S. soil."

There are "300 American and/or U.S.-based ISIS sympathizers active" on Twitter or other social media, according to the study, and some "make the leap from keyboard warriors to actual militancy."

Some even "reached mid-level leadership positions within the group."

One is "a charismatic Bosnian immigrant, Abdullah Ramo Pazara," a Bosnian civil war veteran who arrived in America in the 1990s, then in 2011 "developed an interest in a literalist interpretation of Islam."

Two years ago, "just days after obtaining U.S. citizenship, Pazara left for Syria, where he quickly rose to the rank of emir (commander) of a Balkan-dominated battalion working under well-known top ISIS commander Omar al-Shishani," the report recounted. A "small group of Bosnian Americans" around St. Louis, some of whom "originally hailed from the Bosnian town of Teslic... collected almost $8,000, which they sent to Pazara and families of ISIS fighters in the Balkans."
No wonder GOP presidential candidate Ben Carson calls it "the height of hypocrisy" for Obama to demand that Turkey secure its border.

Obama's fellow Democrats are also angry. Rep. Henry Cuellar, whose Texas district borders Mexico, notes that Syrians are already here seeking political asylum and that a plan is needed. And Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California refutes Obama's claim that ISIS is contained, warning, "It is now in 12 other countries."

"They're here!" is no longer just a line from a horror movie.

**KTVL: “Study: ISIS Recruiting people from all Backgrounds in U.S. by using Social Media”, December 1, 2015**

By Kristine Frazao

WASHINGTON (Sinclair Broadcast Group) — A new report released Tuesday gives a clear snapshot of just how many people in America may have some connection to the Islamic State.

The study is titled "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa" and was researched during the last six months by the George Washington University Program on Extremism.

It revealed there are currently 900 active investigations against ISIS sympathizers in all 50 states. It also found there are about 250 Americans who have traveled to or attempted to travel to Syria to join ISIS. Seventy-one individuals have actually [been charged with ISIS-related activities](https://cchs.gwu.edu) since March 2014.

"The numbers are unprecedented," said Seamus Hughes, who co-authored the report.

Hughes and his team spent months pouring over thousands of documents and said one of the most surprising finding was show much the faces those connected to ISIS vary by age, race and educational background.
In a presentation of the report at GWU, panelists laid out ways in which the U.S. government could do more to prevent Americans from "following the Islamic State."

Suggestions include more government funding for prevention, launching a message war at home and not just abroad, and also looking into new laws to protect Muslim Americans who want to help with that counter messaging movement.

"They want to go on twitter they want to interact with radicals and try to change their views on these kinds of things but they’re concerned about the liability. They’re concerned that if they talk to a radical, they end up on a terrorism watch list," Hughes said.

Amb. Alberto Fernandez, who used to work at the U.S. Department of State heading up the effort to assault the ISIS message online, said the government could be doing much more.

"We’re still talking about in relative numbers small groups of people but considering others, how poorly others have done, we need to treat it as a very serious threat."

KVUE ABC: “ISIS mobilization in US in ‘unprecedented’”, December 1, 2015

WASHINGTON – A new study from George Washington University said ISIS/ISIL-related mobilization in the United States is “unprecedented” and that there are “900 active investigations against ISIS sympathizers in all 50 states.”

The George Washington University study, “ISIS in America: from Retweets to Raqqa,” reported that authorities said 250 Americans have traveled to or attempted to travel to Syria/Iraq with the “intent of joining the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).”

Overall, the study found 71 individuals in the United States have been charged with ISIS-related activities since March 2014 and 56 of those arrests have come in 2015. The 56 terrorism-related arrests were a record for any year since September 11, 2001, according to the GWU study.

One of the key recruiting tactics used by ISIS and other extremist groups has been social media. The study found “300 American and/or U.S. based ISIS
sympathizers active on social media.” According to the study, American ISIS sympathizers are most active on Twitter.

Part of the problem for law enforcement fighting back against the terrorist supporters in the United States has been that there is no profile to work from as a base. According to the study, the supporters of ISIS have had various races, ages, social classes, education, and family background.

For example, the study found the “youngest U.S. person arrested for ISIS-related activities was an unnamed 15-year-old boy. Two others were minors, age 16 and 17 at the time of their arrests. The oldest was Tairod Pugh, a former Air Force officer who was 47 at the time of his arrest.”

Still, the authors were able to find that the average age of ISIS sympathizers in the United States was 26 and 86 percent of them were male.

The study’s authors said that arrests alone cannot solve the problem and that a more comprehensive approach must be developed, but that the current resources devoted to “countering violent extremism remain woefully inadequate for the task at hand.”

The authors concluded with this warning about a need to change how the U.S. is approaching counter-terrorism: “American political and civic leader will need to be bold, experimental, and receptive to novel policies and initiatives in order to defeat ISIS and protect some of our fellow citizens from falling into its clutches.”


By Josh Meyer and Tracy Connor

At least 300 Americans, many of them women, are acting as ISIS ambassadors on social media — spreading propaganda and hunting for potential recruits, according to a new report.

Researchers at George Washington University’s Program on Extremism said that Twitter is the platform of choice for U.S. based sympathizers, even though the service regularly suspends accounts that spew ISIS material.
As soon as they are taken down — which is seen as a "badge of honor" — new accounts replace them within hours and are retweeted by others to bring them up to their previous follower level.

The report identified American ISIS supporters who acted as online "spotters" for the terror gang, and the researchers who monitored those accounts for six months were able to watch recruitment of recently converted Americans unfold in real time.

"In one case the seemingly naïve individual posted general questions about religion, to which ISIS supporters quickly responded in a calm and authoritative manner," the authors wrote.

"After a few weeks, the accounts of hardened ISIS supporters slowly introduced increasingly ardent views into the conversation. The new recruit was then invited to continue the conversion privately, often via Twitter's Direct Message feature or on other private messaging platforms such as suresetap."

The report also looked at how U.S. jihadists meet and recruit in person, uncovering small groups of apparent ISIS sympathizers in a number of cities.

"One of them, located in Texas, revolves around a few charismatic individuals and an Islamic studies group. Another, based in the suburbs of a large Midwestern city, appears to be composed of former high school friends and a handful of their acquaintances," the report said.

Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the Program on Extremism, noted that while American ISIS supporters tend to be male, nearly a third of the accounts they examined were supposedly operated by women.

"They communicate primarily in English, and discuss a wide range of topics, from open support of terrorist attacks to boringly benign banter about everyday life," he said. "The online scene is a bit of a close-knit clique, where inside jokes are shared, memes are created, and dissenters are quickly ignored."

J.M. Berger, a social media counterterrorism analyst and co-author of a book about ISIS, said the report's analysis of offline clusters was eye-opening.

"For all that we talk about social media, there is still a significant role for face to face interaction," he said.
New York Magazine: “ISIS Supporters are good at social media, bad at evading arrest”, December 1, 2015

By Eric Levitz

American ISIS supporters have surprisingly little in common. A new study of U.S. citizens suspected of collaborating with ISIS finds that these would-be caliphate dwellers vary widely in race, age, social class, education, and family background — some are disaffected middle-aged Muslim men, others the rebellious teenage daughters of Christian families. But despite their diverse backgrounds, the militants all seem to be really good at using social media and getting arrested.

This year, American authorities have arrested 56 Americans on charges related to the so-called Islamic State, the largest number of terrorism arrests conducted in any year since 9/11, according to the study from George Washington University’s Center for Cyber & Homeland Security. After analyzing the arrest records of 71 Americans suspected of ISIS involvement, the report found that they ranged in age from 15 to 47; that 40 percent were converts to Islam, while 10 percent were women; and that more were arrested in Minnesota and New York than any other U.S. states.

Beyond arrestees, the study found that ISIS has at least 300 American social-media representatives who help spread the group’s psychotic gospel, one meme at a time. Among the other duties of the Islamic State’s Twitter interns are identifying new recruits, promoting the newly created accounts of recently banned ISIS members, and sending death threats to U.S.-based Muslim scholars and activists who question the group’s rogue theology. By virtue of these efforts, ISIS propaganda is routinely consumed by many thousands of Americans, according to the report.

Marine general Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, seemed to refer to this considerable digital influence Tuesday, when he told the House Armed Services Committee that ISIS had been "tactically" contained in the Middle East, but "Strategically they have spread since 2010."

The study also notes the existence of a few scattered ISIS-themed book clubs, where small pockets of jihadist sympathizers actually meet in person.

"One of them, located in Texas, revolves around a few charismatic individuals and an Islamic studies group. Another, based in the suburbs of a large..."
Midwestern city, appears to be composed of former high school friends and a handful of their acquaintances," the authors write.

The report concedes that the vast majority of those involved in the ISIS "counter-culture" will never "make the leap from talk to action." Nonetheless, the authors argue that this “unprecedented” level of domestic “ISIS-related radicalization and mobilization” is a serious security threat. It only takes one unstable individual with a weapon to translate internet propaganda into human tragedy.

NPR: “‘Unprecedented’: What ISIS Looks Like In America”, December 1, 2015

By Bill Chappell

They connect via online services — especially Twitter — and in everyday life. Their ages range from 15 to 47, and their roles range from cheering attacks to plotting violence. And curbing their growth is a dynamic challenge without a simple solution: There are currently 900 active investigations into ISIS sympathizers in every American state.

Those are some of the findings of a new study that glimpses life "inside the bubble of American ISIS sympathizers, a diverse and diffuse scene that the FBI estimates include hundreds, if not thousands, of individuals."

Titled "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," the report by Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes focuses on around 300 people who have been identified as American recruits or supporters of ISIS.

While it’s not new for Americans to join jihadist groups, Vidino, who directs the Program on Extremism at George Washington University, says, "the size of the ISIS-related radicalization and mobilization is unprecedented."

NPR's Carrie Johnson reports:

"The report reviewed social media accounts and legal cases against Islamic State recruits. The study says the highest number of recruits have been charged in New York and Minnesota, though the FBI has open investigations in all 50 states.

George Washington University's Program on Extremism
2000 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 2210 – Washington, DC 20052
@GWUPoE - https://cchs.gwu.edu/program-extremism
"The report's authors say the average age of the ISIS sympathizers is 26 — and more than half have traveled or tried to travel abroad.

"About 40 percent of the cases George Washington reviewed involved converts to Islam, and a small fraction, about 1 in 10, are women."

The group is very diverse — both in their demographics and in what motivates them.

"While some seek to join the self-declared caliphate in ISIS-controlled territory, others plan attacks within the U.S.," Vidino says in a statement accompanying the report. "It's a growing and disturbing phenomenon."

Describing the ISIS sympathizers, he says, "We have seen cases in big cities and rural towns. The individuals involved range from hardened militants to teenage girls, petty criminals and college students."

Looking at 71 people who've been indicted in the U.S. for ISIS-related activities, Vidino and his colleagues say that except for seven suspects whose legal residency status hasn't been determined, "the vast majority of individuals charged are U.S. citizens (58) or permanent residents (6), underscoring the homegrown nature of the threat."

The pace of arrests is increasing, with the researchers saying that the 56 arrests made in 2015 are already the most in one year since September of 2001.

As for how to combat ISIS's reach in the U.S., the report's authors recommend boosting funding to create dynamic programs; helping non–law enforcement groups take people off the path to radicalization; and encouraging American Muslims to engage with ISIS supporters without fear of becoming a target of a federal inquiry.

Describing how ISIS has used technology to reach into U.S. society, the report says:

- "Several thousand Americans consume ISIS propaganda online creating what has been described as a 'radicalization echo chamber.'"
- Twitter is "by far the platform of choice" for American activists to connect. Other routes include Facebook, Google+ and Tumblr, along with messaging services like "Kik, Telegram, surespot, and the dark web."
- On Twitter, many of the most popular pro-ISIS accounts are "shout-out accounts," which the researchers call "a unique innovation and vital to the
survival of the ISIS online scene." The accounts introduce new activists — but even more important, they promote the new accounts of users who’ve been suspended by Twitter.

- "American accounts, like the larger ISIS echo chamber, tend not to tolerate dissent and silence attempts at nuance. Muslim religious leaders, particularly those living in the West, who condemn ISIS are routinely dismissed as 'coconuts,' a derogatory term used to insult those accused of denying their Muslim identity. Many U.S.-based Muslim scholars and activists, even those from conservative backgrounds, are subject to routine death threats."

The Internet isn’t always the main point of contact, the researchers say. In some cases, people became radicalized by in-person meetings with "preexisting social contacts who already embraced jihadist ideology" — and over time, a cluster of like-minded individuals forms.

Most of the sympathizers who are engaged in an ISIS "counter-culture" will never "make the leap from talk to action," the report says. But it adds that some will turn to real militancy — whether that means attempting to take violent action overseas or at home in the U.S.

Citing the wide range of people who’ve been identified as ISIS activists, the report states, "Because there is no standard recruit profile, there is also no silver bullet that will blunt ISIS's allure. Recognizing this complexity is a vital initial step for policymakers, law enforcement officials, civic leaders, teachers and parents when crafting effective solutions."


By Eric Schmitt

WASHINGTON — American authorities this year have arrested nearly five dozen people in the United States for helping to support or plot with the Islamic State, according to a new study, the largest number of terrorism-related arrests in the country in a single year since September 2001.

The Islamic State recruits defy any single profile, the study found, although they are younger than previous terrorism suspects, are drawn heavily from converts to
Islam and reflect increasingly prominent roles for women in the terrorist organization.

A demographic snapshot of the 71 individuals arrested on charges related to the Islamic State since March 2014, including 56 this year, emerged from a comprehensive review of social media accounts and legal documents of nearly 400 American sympathizers of the Islamic State conducted by researchers at George Washington University.

The volume and diversity of those arrested underscore the growing challenge the F.B.I. and local law enforcement agencies face in trying to identify, monitor and, if necessary, apprehend suspects at a time when the Islamic State has sharply increased its appeal to Westerners through Twitter, Facebook and other social media.

“The individuals range from hardened militants to teenage girls, petty criminals and college students,” said Lorenzo Vidino, the director of the university’s program on extremism, which conducted the study. “The diversity is staggering.”

The report, “ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa,” was made public on Tuesday.

Even before the recent attacks in Paris, at least three dozen people in the United States suspected of ties to the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, were under heavy electronic or physical surveillance, according to American officials. Those under investigation typically have little terrorism expertise or support from a cell, making it even more difficult for the authorities to predict or detect who might carry out a strike.

“For law enforcement, it’s extremely difficult to determine who makes a big leap from keyboard jihadist to doing something,” said Dr. Vidino, who has studied Islamism for 15 years.

The people in the George Washington University study ranged from a 15-year-old boy to Tairod Pugh, who was formerly enlisted in the Air Force and was 47 at the time of his arrest. The average age of the American supporter of the Islamic State was 26, the report found, reflecting a pattern unfolding in other Western countries as social media attracts younger recruits.

John P. Carlin, the assistant attorney general for national security, has said that of the terrorism-related arrests in the past 18 months, mostly involving the
Islamic State, 80 percent of those arrested were younger than 30, and 40 percent were under 21.

According to the study, about 14 percent of those arrested were women, and the vast majority were American citizens or permanent residents, emphasizing the threat the authorities are combating from homegrown recruits, compared with foreigners infiltrating the country.

Some 40 percent of those arrested were converts to Islam, a larger representation among American supporters of the Islamic State than the 23 percent of American Muslims over all who are converts, according to the study.

Slightly more than half of those arrested had tried to travel abroad, most likely to Iraq or Syria, or were arrested during their travels to conflict zones, the report said. At least seven Americans have died fighting with the Islamic State in Iraq or Syria.

But American authorities have recently detected a trend that they believe shows the effect of the group’s new message to stay at home and carry out attacks there: There has been a significant drop in the number of Americans seeking to go to Syria and Iraq to join the group. Counterterrorism officials say that since July, an average of two Americans a month have tried to travel or successfully traveled to Islamic State territory, compared with nine a month over the previous year.

More than half of those charged were arrested in an operation involving an informant or an undercover agent, the report said, a tactic that has caused tensions between the F.B.I. and some American Muslims.

The [story of a newlywed couple](#) arrested in August in Mississippi as they began a trip to Syria to join the Islamic State illustrates several of these trends.

The couple, Jaelyn Delshaun Young, 19, and Muhammad Oda Dakhllalla, 22, were on their way to the airport in Columbus when they were arrested by F.B.I. agents after unwittingly making travel plans with undercover federal agents on social media that included discussing a trip to Syria via Greece and Turkey as a honeymoon ruse.

That case was just one of about 900 open inquiries that the F.B.I. director, James B. Comey, said were related to the Islamic State. Most of them have not become wide-ranging investigations, because they were generated by tips that
were not substantiated. According to law enforcement officials, the F.B.I. typically has about 10,000 open counterterrorism inquiries.

The Islamic State’s use of social media to recruit followers has been widely reported, but Dr. Vidino said the study found that paths to radicalization were varied: Some responded to online propaganda; others sought meaning in like-minded groups that actually travel to Syria and Iraq.

Much of the study’s research focused on the Twitter activities of about 300 individuals identified as American supporters of the Islamic State. Nearly a third of those accounts are said to be operated by women. The American Islamic State adherents who traveled to war zones posted real-time updates of their exploits, the report said, and at times scolded supporters of the group back home “for their lack of commitment to the cause.”


By Nolan D. McCaskill

The Islamic State’s mobilization in the United States has been “unprecedented,” a report released Tuesday found.

According to the George Washington University study, “Isis in America: From Retweets to Raqqa,” authorities have spoken to roughly 250 Americans who have at least attempted to travel to Syria or Iraq to join the Islamic State and have a total of 900 active probes against Islamic State supporters in every state.

Since March 2014, the report found, 71 people have been charged with Islamic State-related activity — 56 arrests have come in 2015 alone, the largest number of terrorism-related arrests since 9/11.

“The profiles of individuals involved in ISIS-related activities in the U.S. differ widely in race, age, social class, education, and family background,” the report reads. “Their motivations are equally diverse and deny easy analysis.”

Among those charged, an overwhelming majority are men, the report found, and the average age at the time of charges is 26, though arrests range from an
unnamed 15-year-old boy to Tairod Pugh, a former Air Force mechanic who was 47 when he was charged.

The report highlights that the vast majority of Islamic State sympathizers are U.S. citizens or permanent residents, though 73 percent of those charged weren’t involved in plotting terror attacks on the homeland. And while the Islamic State’s radicalization isn’t limited to social media, the study found that sympathizers were “particularly active on Twitter, where they spasmodically create accounts that often get suspended in a never-ending cat-and-mouse game.”

The release of the six-month study, conducted by GWU’s Program on Extremism, comes on the heels of the Nov. 13 terrorist attacks that struck Paris and amid increased scrutiny over the Obama administration’s plans to take in 10,000 Syrian refugees next year.

President Barack Obama last month — just one day before the Paris attacks — suggested the Islamic State was “contained,” telling ABC’s- George Stephanopoulos that U.S.-led airstrikes had “contained the momentum that ISIL had gained.” A senior administration official, however, told POLITICO at the time that Obama was referring to the military situation on the ground rather than the Islamic State’-s ability to stage attacks in the West.

In a TV interview on Tuesday, Retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn said that the White House had ignored his warnings about the Islamic State. Headed by Flynn, the Defense Intelligence Agency in 2012 alerted the administration of the potential rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Soon after, though, Obama referred to the terrorist organization as the “JV team.”

“You know, I think that they did not meet a particular narrative that the White House needed,” the former DIA chief told CNN’s Jake Tapper, adding that he thought the people close to Obama had advised him incorrectly.

“I think the narrative was that al Qaeda was on the run and [Osama] bin Laden was dead, and they were dead and these guys, we’ve beaten them,” Flynn said. “And we knew that. I mean, we’ve killed more leaders in al Qaeda, ISIS, AQI, Boko Haram — more leaders than we can say, and they continue to just multiply.”
The Defense Department’s investigator general is examining claims that intel reports on the Islamic State were revised or covered up to exaggerate U.S. military successes in the Middle East.

Reuters: “Islamic State’s online supporters include 300 Americans: report”, December 1, 2015

By Mark Hosenball

Active online supporters of the Syria-based Islamic State movement now include about 300 people identifiable as Americans, said a study by academic experts published on Tuesday.

George Washington University’s Program on Extremism said in the study that the number of other Americans who passively "consume" Islamic State propaganda runs to "several thousand," though they are not necessarily active supporters of the group.

Twitter is the "platform of choice" most widely used by the active core of American supporters of Islamic State, it said.

American ISIS activists and sympathizers also use other social media, ranging from open forums such as Facebook, Google+ and Tumblr to more secretive messaging apps including Kik, Telegram, surespot and the dark web, the study said.

American online ISIS supporters are sufficiently active and noisy to have established themselves as "nodes," or leading voices promoting Islamic State themes, while others serve as "amplifiers," who repost materials from more prominent activists.

The study said U.S. Islamic State activists have helped craft a "unique innovation" in militant messaging. This involves creation of "shout out" accounts, which enable activists to "introduce new pro-ISIS accounts to the community and promote newly created accounts of previously suspended users, allowing them to quickly regain their pre-suspension status."
The study noted that, although American social media accounts linked to ISIS are regularly suspended, among the activists such suspensions have become a "badge of honor and a means by which an aspirant can bolster his or her legitimacy."

Operators of suspended accounts usually set up and start using a newly created account, using only a variation of the previous user name, "within hours" of most suspensions, it said.

Even though Islamic State's forerunners first emerged after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Islamic State's "message did not exist" before the organization established itself in Syria and became involved in a civil war against the government of President Bashar al Assad, said Lorenzo Vidino, one of the study’s principal authors.

Vidino cited FBI statistics indicating that U.S. authorities are currently pursuing 900 terrorism-related investigations in all 50 U.S. states. His study noted that 71 individuals have been charged by U.S. authorities with ISIS-related offenses since March 2014, with 51 of those arrests occurring in 2015.


Titled "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," the report focuses on around 300 people who have been identified as American recruits or supporters of the terrorist organization.

The diverse group ranges in age from 15 to 47 with an average age of 26 years; 40% are converts to Islam; about one in 10 are women; and more than half have traveled or have tried to travel abroad, the report says.

The sympathizers connect with the terror group online – especially via Twitter – and in everyday life. Their motivations vary.

The group is among what the FBI estimates is "hundreds, if not thousands, of individuals" who are sympathetic to Daesh, the report says. The bureau has open investigations into recruits in every state.
While it is not new for Americans to join jihadist groups, Vidino says "the size of the ISIS-related radicalization and mobilization is unprecedented."

While the report says that most of the sympathizers will never "make the leap from talk to action," it also acknowledges that some will turn to real militancy – whether at home or abroad.

"Because there is no standard recruit profile, there is also no silver bullet that will blunt ISIS's allure. Recognizing this complexity is a vital initial step for policymakers, law enforcement officials, civic leaders, teachers and parents when crafting effective solutions."

Sputnik News: “US Sees Record Number of Terrorism-Related Arrests in 2015”, December 1, 2015

NEW YORK (Sputnik) — A record number of individuals have been arrested on Daesh-related terrorism charges in the United States this year, according to a George Washington University Program on Extremism report published on Tuesday.

The report "ISIS in America" also found that as of the fall of 2015, US authorities have spoken to at least 250 Americans who have travelled or attempted to travel to Syria or Iraq to join Daesh.

Moreover, the report states there are at least 900 active investigations against Daesh sympathizers in all 50 US states.

The average age of individuals facing Daesh-related charges is 26, and more than 86 percent of those individuals are male, according to the report.

The Program on Extremism reviewed more than 7,000 pages of legal documents detailing Daesh-related legal proceedings, including criminal complaints, indictments, affidavits and courtroom transcripts, prior to publishing the report.

By Daniel White

Authorities in the U.S. have arrested more than 50 people so far this year for activities related to the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS), according to a new study released Tuesday.

So far, 2015 has already seen the largest number of terrorism-related arrests in a single year since 9/11, according to an analysis of legal documents and social media accounts by George Washington University. Many of those arrests were connected to ISIS—of the 71 people who have been charged with supporting or plotting with ISIS since March 2014, 56 of those arrests came in 2015 alone, the study found.

According to the study, “ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa,” there are hundreds of American ISIS sympathizers who have not been arrested, and they are “particularly active on Twitter,” creating accounts that get suspended in a cat-and-mouse game with authorities. Most ISIS supporters in the U.S. are radicalized online, but many also discuss their interest in ISIS with others in person, the study found.

While the threat of radicalization exists in the U.S., the study concludes that it is “significantly smaller, more decentralized, and less professional than that of most European countries.” Authorities in U.K. alone arrested nearly 300 people on terrorism-related charges in the past year, according to the Wall Street Journal.

Authorities have spoken to some 250 Americans regarding their attempts to travel to Syria or Iraq to join ISIS, while authorities have 900 active investigations against ISIS sympathizers, the George Washington study found.

The six-month study’s release comes shortly after the Nov. 13 terrorist attacks in Paris, claimed by ISIS, which left 130 people dead.

Tribune-Review: “Web-savvy terrorists have success luring U.S. recruits with social media”, December 1, 2015

By Mike Wereschagin
The police officer’s daughter and imam’s son looked, to their relatives and friends, like any other newlyweds about to begin a life together.

But behind the veneer, Mohammad Dakhlalla, 22 and Jaelyn Young, 19, planned a secret honeymoon to Syria to join the Islamic State, according to a report released Tuesday by the Project on Extremism at George Washington University.

The two Mississippians are among 71 Americans arrested on charges of joining or trying to join ISIS since the group formed in March 2014.

Fifty-six of those were arrested in 2015, more than in any year since Sept. 11, 2001, according to the report. What's more, those charged “are merely the tip of the iceberg,” the report states.

FBI Director James Comey has told Congress that the bureau is investigating about 900 cases spread across all 50 states.

“They're trending younger. The average age (of recruits) is 26, but of the cases we looked at, one-third were 21 years old or younger,” said Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the Program on Extremism and a co-author of the report. For other terrorist groups, the average age of recruits is closer to 30, he said.

Much of ISIS’s appeal to young recruits runs through social media, whose platforms give the group unprecedented reach into communities around the world. People don’t need to attend a radical mosque or spend time with recruiters to be exposed to the caliphate’s propaganda. They merely need to turn on their computer or open a smartphone app.

“They post near real-time updates of ISIS-led attacks and life in the caliphate, encouraging their fellow Americans to make the trek and, at times, scolding their real-world and online friends for their lack of commitment to the cause,” states the report, “ISIS in America: from Retweets to Raqqa.”

The report describes an online operation both vast and nimble, large enough to bombard anyone with pro-ISIS messages, yet able to quickly adapt to evade efforts to silence them by social media companies — Twitter, to name one — whose technology they’re using.

The report divides ISIS-related Twitter accounts into three categories: nodes, whose users create most of the original content that supporters retweet; amplifiers, some of which might be automated accounts that retweet the nodes; and shout-out accounts.
“Shout-out accounts are a unique innovation and vital to the survival of the ISIS online scene,” the report states.

Twitter administrators routinely shut down ISIS-related accounts, but owners of the deleted accounts quickly reemerge with new handles that Twitter hasn’t blocked. Shout-out accounts retweet those new handles, allowing online operatives to quickly rebuild their following, the report found.

The account suspensions, meanwhile, “become a badge of honor” to ISIS-affiliated users, who use them as a means of bolstering their credibility in the online community, according to the report.

The online hacker collective Anonymous pledged, after the Paris terror attacks, to help identify and shut down ISIS-related Twitter accounts and websites.

About 40 percent of ISIS’ American recruits are converts to Islam, compared to 23 percent of all Muslims in the United States being converts to the faith, the report states. ISIS supporters aid the radicalization by taking malleable converts in search of information about their new faith and gradually introducing them into “an echo chamber” of online propaganda, Hughes said.

“They don’t allow dissenters in there,” Hughes said.

Of the 71 people charged with trying to aid ISIS, just over half tried to travel abroad to join the group, the report found. A minority — 27 percent — plotted attacks within the United States. U.S. recruits are a mere fraction of the thousands of recruits who’ve left from Europe.

The ages of those arrested in the United States range from 15 to 47, and include Pittsburgh-born Amiir Farouk Ibrahim, who grew up in Saudi Arabia and Cairo. His passport was found in 2013 in a compound captured from the Sunni terrorist group that preceded ISIS.

Poverty and education — two factors closely associated with how likely a person is to commit a crime — don’t work as a predictor for terrorism, Hughes said.

“It’s hard to figure out a typical profile. You’ve got rich, you’ve got poor. You’ve got kids in high school, you’ve got college-educated (recruits). It just runs the gamut,” Hughes said. “There’s not going to be a checklist law enforcement can do that says if you hit these 10 buckets, we know you’re someone to be concerned about.”
UPI: “Study: Islamic State Recruitment in U.S. is varied, ‘unprecedented’”, December 1, 2015

By Amy R. Connolly

WASHINGTON, Dec. 1 (UPI) -- From a 15-year old Philadelphia-area boy to a 47-year old former Air Force officer, Islamic State recruits in the United States vary as widely as the country's diverse landscape, defying any single profile and creating an unprecedented IS mobilization in the United States, a new study found.

So far this year, authorities have arrested 56 people in the United States trying to support or plot with the known militant group also identified as ISIS, ISIL and Daesh. Since March 2014, 71 people have been arrested on terrorism-related activities, forging a complex patchwork of potential jihadist soldiers throughout the country, researchers at George Washington University found.

The study, "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," found, as of fall 2015, some 250 Americans have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria or Iraq to join the IS. Also, there are 900 active investigations into IS sympathizers in the same time period across every state.

Lorenzo Vidino, director of the university’s Program on Extremism, said there is "no method to the madness" regarding the diversity of IS recruits in the United States. That said, political and civic leaders must "be bold, experimental and receptive to novel policies and initiatives."

"It is obviously something unprecedented and of concern to law enforcement," Vidino said. "It’s always been diverse but never to this extent."

The study, conducted over six months, found the United States, when compared to countries including France, Britain, Belgium and Denmark, has seen fewer radicalizations due to an integrated American Muslim community and limited "radicalizing agents." The movement in the United States is being propelled by social media, mostly starting on Twitter but now moving to other platforms including Telegram.

Of the 71 charged with IS-related activities since March 2014:
-- The average age is 26. , -- 86 percent are male.

-,- They are located in 21 states.

-- 51 percent traveled or attempted to travel abroad.

-- ,27 percent were involved in plots to carry out attacks on U.S. soil.

-- , 55 percent were arrested in an operation involving an informant and/or an undercover agent.

Among those who have become entangled with the extremist group was 33-year-old Douglas McCain from San Diego Calif., an aspiring rapper killed in Syria fighting for the IS in 2014, shocking his family and friends. Tairod Pugh, a 47-year-old former Air Force officer, pleaded not guilty in March for trying to join and assist the IS. An unnamed 15-year-old boy was arrested outside Philadelphia for threatening an IS-inspired attack on Pope Francis during his U.S. visit in August.

Researchers said the diversity of those arrested underscores the growing need for strong, uniform national policy to contend with the changing outlook. That includes more funding for programs to counter violent extremism and alternatives to arrest that will "help sway individuals from the path of radicalization."

Vindino said former IS soldiers who have given up on the extremist group may play a crucial role in stopping the tide of new U.S. recruits. Researchers recommend "limited immunity for some returning foreign fighters, as their messages are more likely to resonate than those delivered by most other counter-messaging programs."

While such a program would have to be approached carefully, it could help spoil the idealized image the IS holds with potential recruits. Vindino said it is already being considered by security agencies including the Justice Department independent of the study.

"There is something to granting immunity and using them from a public relations point of view to publicize what it really is," he said.

Vocativ: “ISIS in America: Who is The Average Islamic State Sympathizer?”, December 1, 2015
By Sarah Kaufman

More people in the U.S. were arrested for alleged connections to ISIS this year than in any previous year. A new report analyzes the 56 people who were detained this year, of 71 charged since March 2014, and the results paint a rough sketch of the Islamic State’s adherents inside the U.S. An ISIS sympathizer in America is most likely to be young, male and a citizen or permanent resident of the United States.

For the report, “ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa,” which was produced by George Washington University’s Program on Extremism, researchers reviewed social media accounts and legal documents related to almost 400 alleged ISIS sympathizers living in America and found they were a pretty diverse group. “The profiles of individuals involved in ISIS-related activities in the U.S. differ widely in race, age, social class, education, and family background,” the report said. “Their motivations are equally diverse and defy easy analysis.”

Nonetheless, some generalities emerge. Here’s a brief sketch of the average person alleged to be an ISIS sympathizer in America.

86 percent are male

The 71 alleged ISIS sympathizers charged since March 2014 were overwhelmingly male. However, one-third of the Twitter accounts held by ISIS sympathizers the researchers analyzed were purportedly handled by women.

The average age is 26

The people studied ranged in age, but on the whole, they were younger than supporters of al Qaeda or the Taliban. The researchers quoted U.S. Assistant Attorney General John Carlin, who said in September, “In over 50 percent of the cases the defendants are 25 years or younger… That is different than the demographic we saw who went to support core al Qaeda.”

27 percent allegedly planned to attack inside the U.S.

The majority—73 percent—of people alleged to have been ISIS sympathizers in the U.S. were charged for something other than plotting a domestic terror attack. Most were charged for sending money or support overseas to Syria, the report noted.
51 percent tried to travel abroad

Over half of the alleged American ISIS supporters tried to leave the U.S., authorities say. Those who did end up successfully traveling to Iraq and Syria often posted online real-time updates of their lives in ISIS-held territory. Many accused their social media followers in the U.S. of a “lack of commitment to the cause,” for not following suit.

90 percent were U.S. citizens or permanent residents

Fifty-eight of the 71 people charged were U.S. citizens and six were permanent residents, underlining the fact that authorities believe most of the people alleged to have been ISIS supporters in the U.S. were homegrown, not radicalized before coming to the country.

40 percent were converts to Islam

Around 40 percent of ISIS sympathizers in the U.S. who were arrested were converts to Islam, whereas 23 percent of American Muslims are converts, according to the report.

Most were active on social media, with 3 main types of accounts

The report laid out three primary types of Twitter accounts supporting the Islamic State: nodes, amplifiers and shout-out accounts. Nodes were characterized as leading voices in the ISIS world, and amplifiers were known as accounts used largely to favorite and retweet popular accounts and announcements. Shout-out accounts were said to introduce new members to the community or point users in the direction of the new account of a supporter’s previously deleted account.

Voice of America: “Speed, Social Media Shape Counterterrorism Probes”, December 1, 2015

By Katherine Gibson

In the aftermath of the Paris attacks, officials carried out waves of raids and arrests to try to break up terror cells across Europe. As in any criminal investigation, the crime scene provides key evidence that leads investigators to suspects still at large.
But as former counterterrorism officials told VOA, investigations of terror attacks differ in two key aspects: They’re accelerated by the possibility of another attack, and a wealth of information about the suspects spreads across social media.

“After a major attack, you’re always worried about the next attack, so you want to make sure you figure out who is in that network and how you take down that network before they commit another attack,” said Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University.

The investigation begins at the crime scene. As with any criminal investigation, police seal off the area and forensic teams go in to dust for fingerprints and collect evidence. It’s the speed at which this is done that makes a terror attack probe different.

“The French police were desperate to move that at an incredibly accelerated rate because there was the great fear that there was going to be another terrorist action taking place, maybe within the hour,” said Raymond Batvinis, a former FBI agent who has run counterterrorism training sessions since the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States.

The evidence at the crime scene combined with eyewitness interviews can lead investigators to a search online, where valuable data on locations, connections and motives can help build a background profile.

“You’re collecting all of these phone numbers, all of this data, all of this email data, all of the texting data, all of the Facebook and Twitter data, and they’re building up a profile of the individual, of who his or her contacts are,” Batvinis said.

Digital communication

Social media — the connection point for so many terrorists — can speed up the investigation. The demographics of potential extremists lend themselves particularly well to communication on digital platforms.

“Given the ages of the attackers and most people joining ISIS, they tend to be younger, which means they’re on social media,” Hughes said. "They have a profile. They have a sense of it. They’ve been using it for years and you can get a sense of who their network is. You can see them when they pop their head up."
Working off that real-time information can lead investigators to the neighborhoods where the terrorists live.

“We would be knocking on doors, we would be ringing bells, we would be there all night getting people out of bed and saying, ‘Your name showed up. Let’s sit down and have a conversation,’” Batvinis said.

Batvinis and Hughes said those conversations could range from the helpful to the confrontational. Many investigators go into such sessions hoping to establish a rapport with the interviewees that will yield the small pieces of information that contribute to the larger picture.

Ultimately, Batvinis said, it is up to an experienced investigator to know how seemingly disparate and often scattered pieces of information fit together and lead to the decision to stage a raid.

“It’s not scientific. The tips come in and you look at them, and frankly it requires an experienced eye to say, ‘We’re going to prioritize this.’”

Ultimately, the pressured timelines of a terrorism investigation led to the raids seen in Paris and Brussels, which could prevent future attacks and provide investigators with the crucial information for criminal prosecutions.

Wall Street Journal: “ISIS Sympathizers in U.S. Prefer Twitter Among Social Media”, December 1, 2015

By Devlin Barrett and Nicole Hong

Islamic State is renowned for its ability to mobilize followers via social media like Twitter, but the group is also attracting clusters of American followers who meet in person and push one another toward violence, experts and law-enforcement officials say.

A study published Tuesday by George Washington University’s Program on Extremism examined cases involving Americans charged with terrorism for their suspected support of Islamic State and found their conversion to the group’s world view often involved a significant amount of direct contact with “pre-existing social contacts who already embraced jihadist ideology.”

Concerns over threats from small groups of terrorist sympathizers have taken on a new urgency following last month’s attacks in Paris, which were carried out by
people whose friendships and family connections appear to have formed the backbone of one or more terrorist cells.

Since the attacks, which killed over 100 people, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has upped its surveillance of known Islamic State supporters. U.S. counterterrorism officials say they haven’t uncovered any terror network or trained operatives in the U.S. like those who operated in Paris. Nor have they seen an uptick in the threat from people who might be inspired by the Paris bloodshed to launch copycat attacks, though they caution it is too early to measure that accurately.

About 70 people have been arrested in the U.S. on charges tied to Islamic State since early 2014, with investigations continuing in all 50 states, according to law-enforcement officials. Fifty-six people were arrested in 2015 alone, the largest number of terror arrests in a year since the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, the report said.

Tracking such suspects is a labor-intensive effort that has stretched thin the agencies charged with preventing attacks. The case load was so heavy in the spring and summer that the FBI had to pull agents off of criminal work to assist in terror cases. Director James Comey has called that unsustainable over the long term.

But since July, the pace of new prosecutions has slowed, and the number of Americans trying to travel to Syria has dropped from about two a week to about two a month, according to officials.

Nineteen people have pleaded guilty, including seven who have already been sentenced to prison time, according to the Center on National Security at Fordham University’s School of Law, which also tracks ISIS cases. The rest are working their way through the courts.

The researchers at George Washington University said they have identified approximately 300 American supporters of the terrorist group, also known as ISIS or ISIL, on Twitter, the social-media platform of choice for many of the group’s supporters. The report also identifies two unnamed clusters of Islamic State-supporting friends, and the investigations are ongoing.

“ISIS is really good at motivating that single person to go out and do something, but...not many people act out in a way that’s truly alone. What we see more often are small cells,” said J.M. Berger, a counterterrorism expert and a nonresident fellow at the Brookings Institution, a think tank.
One cluster of friends in Texas “revolves around a few charismatic individuals and an Islamic studies group,” the report said. “Another, based in the suburbs of a large Midwestern city, appears to be composed of former high-school friends and a handful of their acquaintances.” The researchers didn’t further identify the groups as they said they didn’t want to interfere with potential criminal investigations.

Some clusters of alleged Islamic State supporters in the U.S. have been exposed by investigations. Federal prosecutors this summer brought a series of cases against five friends living in New York and New Jersey who allegedly pledged allegiance to Islamic State and were plotting to travel overseas to fight for the group.

Communications on social media began as early as 2012 between defendants Nader Saadeh, of Rutherford, N.J., and Munther Omar Saleh, of Queens, N.Y. As their discussions developed into the following year, they talked about their desire to build a “small army” of friends to fight against America, according to the indictments.

The group incorporated more people and began meeting together to watch Islamic State beheading videos and discuss plans to go overseas, prosecutors said. Some defendants were meeting on almost a daily basis between May and June, during which Mr. Saadeh flew from John F. Kennedy Airport to Amman, Jordan, with the intention of joining Islamic State, the indictments alleged.

Two defendants in this case have pleaded guilty to conspiracy charges, and Nader Saadeh is in plea negotiations, court papers say. Cases against the remaining two defendants, including Mr. Saleh, who have pleaded not guilty, are pending. Deborah Colson, the lawyer for Mr. Saleh, said: “We ask that the public withhold judgment until all of the facts are revealed.” Lawyers for the other defendants didn’t respond to requests for comment.

Defendants linked to Islamic State have posed unprecedented law-enforcement challenges. They are, on average, 26 years old, but have been as young as 15, younger than terrorism suspects charged in the U.S. in the past, the report says. Most of them are male, but the report says women, who make up almost 15% of the arrests, “are taking an increasingly prominent role.” Converts to Islam are overrepresented, comprising 40% of those arrested. The majority of suspects charged are U.S. citizens or legal residents, “underscoring the homegrown nature of the threat,” the report said, which said some clusters are organized around ethnicity.
Social media, particularly Twitter, play a big role. Online “spotters” engage with people posting general questions about religion, says the report, which described an exchange that started as a calm discussion of faith before “hardened ISIS supporters slowly introduced increasingly ardent views into the conversation.”

A spokesman for Twitter Inc. said in a statement, “Violent threats and the promotion of terrorism deserve no place on Twitter, and our rules make that clear,” and pointed to Twitter’s terms of service, which say the firm will “take action” on accounts that threaten or promote violence.

The Washington Post: “The fight against terror is not about refugees”, December 1, 2015

By Jennifer Rubin

Right-wing candidates lacking national security expertise desperately want to make the attacks in Paris about refugees. Aside from the noxious ploy to whip up anti-immigrant sentiment, the facts show a different story than these politicians would like to create. The New York Times reports:

American authorities this year have arrested nearly five dozen people in the United States for helping to support or plot with the Islamic State, according to a new study, the largest number of terrorism-related arrests in the country in a single year since September 2001.

The Islamic State recruits defy any single profile, the study found, although they are younger than previous terrorism suspects, draw heavily on converts to Islam, and reflect increasingly prominent roles for women in the terrorist organization.

A demographic snapshot of the 71 individuals arrested on charges related to the Islamic State since March 2014, including 56 this year, emerged from a comprehensive review of social media accounts and legal documents of nearly 400 American sympathizers of the Islamic State conducted by researchers at George Washington University. . . . According to the study, about 14 percent of those arrested were women, and the vast majority were American citizens or permanent residents, emphasizing the homegrown threat the authorities are combating, compared with foreigners infiltrating the country.
The Hill newspaper adds an important bit of data: " ‘What we do see in the United States is an unprecedented mobilization’ that is ‘bigger than any other mobilization we have seen since 9/11,’ Lorenzo Vidino, the director of George Washington University’s program on extremism, said during an event releasing the report.”

This does not mean that we should be unconcerned about visitors on visas, border security and refugees (who are vetted extensively for more than a year overseas). It does, however, mean that making this the focus of our fight against Islamic terror is entirely misguided, not to mention politically opportunistic.

We might start with having an effective policy (a policy, even) aimed at destroying the enemy, which gives training and inspiration to terrorists acting on its behalf around the globe. The Hill reports:

The United States has "not contained" the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the nation’s top military officer said Tuesday, contradicting President Obama’s remarks last month about the terror group.

“We have not contained” ISIS, Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told lawmakers at a House Armed Services Committee hearing. . . .

His remarks were in response to questioning by Rep. Randy Forbes (R-Va.) on whether ISIS has been contained at any time since 2010.

Dunford added that ISIS posed a threat beyond Iraq and Syria to countries such as Egypt, Nigeria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon and Jordan.

The president has no answer, so he goes to Paris to talk about climate change. Right-wingers pandering to isolationists have no answer, so they talk about immigrants. Maybe we should listen to candidates and elected officials who want to deploy the full assortment of military, economic and intelligence tools at our disposal, ruling out nothing and committing to something more than kicking the can down the road and praying the homeland is not hit.


By Kellan Howell
At least 300 Americans, many of them women, are acting as social media ambassadors for the Islamic State terrorist group, spreading propaganda online and making efforts to radicalize new recruits within the U.S., according to a new report.

Twitter is often the preferred platform for U.S.-based sympathizers, according to the report from the George Washington University’s Program on Extremism. Although Twitter often suspends accounts that spread the terror group’s propaganda, new accounts replace the flagged pages within hours.

Researchers identified 300 American Islamic State sympathizers who acted as online “spotters” for the extremist group, monitoring those accounts for six months and watching the radicalization and recruitment process unfold in real time.

“In one case the seemingly naïve individual posted general questions about religion, to which ISIS supporters quickly responded in a calm and authoritative manner,” the authors wrote, referring to the terrorist group by its acronym.

“After a few weeks, the accounts of hardened ISIS supporters slowly introduced increasingly ardent views into the conversation,” the report stated. “The new recruit was then invited to continue the conversion privately, often via Twitter’s Direct Message feature or on other private messaging platforms such as surespot.”

According to the report, some members of this online “echo chamber” could eventually “make the leap from keyboard warriors to actual militancy.”

While most American Islamic State supporters tend to be male, nearly one-third of the accounts researchers examined were purportedly operated by women.

According to the report, a significant number of Islamic State supporters on Twitter use avatars of black flags, lions and green birds but these avatars can be deceiving.

“A particularly clever account uses a picture of the Detroit Lions, combining a distinctly American pride in an NFL team and the popular Islamic symbol of bravery very frequently used by ISIS supporters,” the report said.

Researchers divided the Twitter accounts into three categories: “nodes,” accounts that generate primary Islamic State-related content; “amplifiers,” those that retweet and favorite tweets to circulate content from popular users; and
“shout-outs,” which promote newly created accounts of previously suspended users.

The report also examined how extremists in the U.S. meet and recruit in person and uncovered small groups of Islamic State sympathizers in several cities.

“One of them, located in Texas, revolves around a few charismatic individuals and an Islamic studies group. Another, based in the suburbs of a large Midwestern city, appears to be composed of former high school friends and a handful of their acquaintances,” the report said.

American Islamic State supporters will also exploit hashtags related to current events to rope in more recruits.

“For example, some tried interjecting in the #BlackLivesMatter conversation in an attempt to bolster their support among African American Muslims and spread their propaganda to unsuspecting Americans of all backgrounds,” the report said.


By Daniel Bassali

A new report released by George Washington University’s program on extremism Tuesday morning found that the Islamic State is enjoying “unprecedented” support within the U.S.

The report, titled “ISIS in America: From Retweets To Raqqa,” primarily focuses on how the terrorist organization attempting to establish an Islamic caliphate recruits Americans to join their cause.

“What we do see in the United States is an unprecedented mobilization,” said Lorenzo Vidino, one of the authors of the report, said. He also said it is “bigger than any other mobilization we have seen since 9/11.”

U.S. authorities have spoken to 250 Americans who have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria or Iraq to join the Islamic State. There are 900 active investigations against the terror group’s sympathizers in all 50 states. Since March 2014, 71 Americans have been charged with supporting the terrorist organization with a dramatic uptick in arrests in 2015.
As part of the report, GW’s Program on Extremism identified some 300 U.S.-based Islamic State sympathizers and analyzed their activity online. The report’s findings stress the uniqueness of each case in which Americans are radicalized over social media.

“The profiles of individuals involved in ISIS-related activities in the U.S. differ widely in race, age, social class, education, and family background,” Vidino said during his presentation of the report. “Their motivations are equally diverse and deny easy analysis.”

Hughes said that sympathizers of the terror group place themselves in an extremist echo chamber, reinforcing the belief system without any dissent. The end result varies—some keep their support within the confines of the Internet by helping spread propaganda, while others turn to actual militancy.

Former Los Angeles Police Chief Michael Downing suggested law enforcement’s approach to identifying those at-risk of radicalization must be as unique as the backgrounds of those involved with ISIS and each case should involve individual attention.

Ambassador Alberto Fernandez said there could not be a blanket counter-narrative used to “off-ramp” people the terror group is trying to reach. Instead, he said the focus should be on poking holes in the terrorist organization’s narrative and disrupting the echo chamber because the U.S. already has its own story to tell of freedom and liberty.

The GW report comes just weeks after the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the coordinated terrorist attacks in Paris that killed 130 people.

WSB-TV Atlanta: “Study finds hundreds of Americans supporting ISIS”, December 1, 2015

WASHINGTON, D.C.—
Federal authorities have arrested more than 70 ISIS supporters and say hundreds more are active on social media in the United States.

A new report from George Washington University gives a picture of the support the terrorist group has here at home and the recruitment efforts targeting Americans.

The study found 71 Americans charged in the U.S. for ISIS-related crimes.
“Of the 71 individuals (arrested) we’ve seen arrested the vast, vast majority are U.S. citizens born and bred here in the U.S.,” said Lorenzo Vidino, with the GW Program on Extremism.

An aspiring rapper turned jihadist fighter on the ground in Syria and a young newlywed Mississippi couple allegedly moving from radical Twitter posts to a plan to travel to Syria and join ISIS are just two examples of the terrorist groups efforts in America.

Another case was an Augusta, Georgia man, Leon Davis, who was arrested at the Atlanta airport on his way to Turkey to join ISIS. Most of this plea agreement for Davis is sealed.

The GW study found more than 350 twitter accounts of Americans who are ISIS supporters.

One ISIS fighter took to Twitter to explain his motivation. “You fly a remote control plane halfway around the world to kill an enemy you are too coward to meet face to face,” the tweet read.

“They’re in a pre-criminal space they’re exercising their first amendment right to free speech of saying support for ISIS, which is nothing illegal but obviously cause for concern,” Vidino said.

The study’s authors say the difficulty for law enforcement is figuring out which of those keyboard warriors make the leap to actual militants.

Yellowhammer News: “Alabama woman radicalized online found to be among ISIS’ most active recruiters”, December 1, 2015

By Cliff Sims

According to a newly released study by George Washington University (GW), an Alabama college student who abandoned her family to join the so called Islamic State is now among the terrorist group’s most active recruiters in the United States, as a result of her active social media presence.
The report, *ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa*, details ISIS’ how ISIS is using social media to motivate existing supporters, and radicalize new ones.

Here’s how it works, [according to the GW Program on Extremism study](https://cchs.gwu.edu/program-extremism):

ISIS Activists and sympathizers are active on a variety of platforms — open forums, private messaging apps, and the dark web — but Twitter is by far the platform of choice. The Program on Extremism identified and monitored approximately 300 American supporters of ISIS on Twitter, including some individuals now in Syria and Iraq. These accounts can be divided into three categories: noes, amplifiers and shout-outs.

**NODES:**
Nodes are the leading voices in the ISIS Twittersphere. They enjoy a prominent status and are the primary content creators for the network. A group of two or three clustered users will often swap comedic memes, news articles and official ISIS tweets, allowing them to pool followers and more easily spread content both to new audiences and throughout their network.

**AMPLIFIERS:**
Amplifiers largely do not generate new content but rather retweet and “favorite” material from popular users. Ultimately, because they post little, if any, original content, it is often unclear whether these accounts correspond to real-life ISIS sympathizers or are programmed to post automatically.

**SHOUT-OUTS:**
Shout-out accounts primarily introduce new, pro-ISIS accounts to the community and promote newly created accounts of previously suspended users, allowing them to quickly regain their pre-suspension status. A unique innovation of the online ISIS scene, they tend to have the largest followings in the Twitter landscape and play a pivotal role in the community’s resilience, despite frequent account suspensions.

**CHARACTERS:**
— Nearly 1/3 of the tracked accounts are purportedly operated by women.
— Most American ISIS supporters online communicate in English.
— Many accounts use avatars of black flags, lions and green birds (a symbol of martyrs).
— Increasingly avatars feature Americans arrested on terrorism charges, killed waging jihad abroad, or committing attacks in the U.S.
One of the Islamic State’s “nodes” is Hoda Muthana, a 20-year-old former Alabama college student from Hoover who was radicalized through social media and ultimately abandoned her family to move to ISIS-controlled Syria.

Hoda’s father, Mohammed, and his wife moved to the United States from Yemen in 1992. All of his children were born here and are American citizens. He told Buzzfeed in an in-depth report that he “controls his kids” like “every family,” but that ISIS “found somehow, some way to (get) through” to his daughter.

Upon her graduation in 2013, Mohammed gave his daughter her first cell phone.

“When [Hoda] get a cell phone, she went on it like any teenager happy with a phone, and she opened Facebook and I saw some of her pictures... and I told her, ‘No, that’s not acceptable,’” he recalls.

“Sometimes she (was) scared, and I thought, What do you have?”

He found what he described as “Islamic apps,” like the Qur’an, but nothing that sparked suspicion. He was actually more suspicious that she was talking to boys than he was that she was being radicalized.

Hoda later said she became interested in deepening her commitment to Islam by watching radicalized Islamic scholars on YouTube. And initially her family liked the changes they saw in her.

“I dressed and behaved more modestly,” she said. “It helped me with my temper and made me a better person overall. They liked the change until they saw me getting ‘jihadi’.”

She went on to set up a Twitter account without her father’s knowledge and gained thousand of followers, ultimately interacting with known ISIS members.

While she maintained the “quiet girl” act at home and began isolating herself from her friends, she identified more and more with radicalized ISIS members and supporters online — the people who would ultimately help her execute an elaborate plan to abandon her family and move to ISIS-controlled territory.

She started her journey by lying to her parents, telling them she needed to go to Atlanta for a college field trip. She left one morning last November carrying only a purse and a school bag. Later that evening she told her family she had accidentally gotten on the wrong bus, and rather than coming back to Birmingham, she would have to stay the night in Atlanta. The following day the
family received a call from an unknown number. It was Hoda. She was in Turkey and revealed to them that she was becoming a member of the Islamic State.

“People are nice [in Hoover] but they’re all about the dunya (the material world), which I didn’t like,” she said.

And in spite of what her father now says, she speculates that her parents may have had some inclination of where things were headed.

“They didn’t know I was leaving, but they had an idea,” Hoda said. “They’d see news reports about girls who have made it [to Syria] and say things like, ‘Hoda would probably do that.’”

She now laughs off the idea that she has somehow been brainwashed.

“Everyone’s parents or family members says that about those who have come here,” Hoda said. “To that I say, ‘Fear Allah, fear Allah with what you accuse us of.’”

Online, she’s even bolder, urging Muslims she left behind in Alabama to violently attack their enemies.

“Americans wake up!” she tweeted earlier this year. “Men and women altogether. You have much to do while you live under our greatest enemy, enough of your sleeping! Go on drive-bys and spill all of their blood, or rent a big truck and drive all over them. Veterans, Patriot, Memorial etc Day parades..go on drive by’s + spill all of their blood or rent a big truck n drive all over them. Kill them.”

Around Christmas of last year, Hoda married a 23-year-old ISIS fighter. He was killed by Jordanian air strikes less than three months later. In spite of that, she has remained committed to staying in ISIS-controlled territory.

“She’s gone,” her father said. “She’s gone.”

She is gone physically, no doubt, but through social media she continues to maintain a presence in the United States as one of ISIS’ most active online recruiters.

**Boston Herald: “U.S. tracks ISIS threat”, December 2, 2015**

By Bob McGovern
Authorities have launched at least 900 investigations into Islamic State sympathizers and issued dozens of indictments in the United States during the last year alone — a staggering rise in suspected domestic terrorist activity that hasn’t been seen since the 9/11 attacks, according to a new study.

“Publicly available information confirms a sharp surge of jihadist activities in the U.S., especially when compared to dynamics seen in the years since the wave of arrests following 9/11,” the report by the George Washington University Program on Extremism states.

Since January, 56 people with links to ISIS have been arrested, according to the report.

They include David Wright and Nicholas Rovinski, local men accused in a conspiracy to provide material support to ISIS, and Alexander Ciccolo, the son of a Boston police captain who stands accused of plotting to commit terrorist acts.

Usaamah Abdullah Rahim of Roslindale, who was shot and killed in June as he menaced federal agents and Boston police with a knife, was also cited in the report.

Rahim was Wright’s cousin, and authorities say the pair was prepared to kill people in the name of ISIS with Rovinski’s help.

“It is apparent the U.S. is home to a small but active cadre of individuals infatuated with ISIS’s ideology, some of whom have decided to mobilize in its furtherance,” the report states.

According to the report, 21 states have had at least one arrest in connection with ISIS-related investigations.

New York had the most cases with 13. Of those charged, 58 were American citizens, while six were permanent residents.

“I was surprised in the number of legal cases. Fifty-six in this year alone is a lot,” said Seamus Hughes, who co-authored the report.

“That’s unprecedented since 911.”

Those facing charges “are merely the tip of the iceberg,” according to the report.
Researchers found “a few dozen individuals with reported ISIS links who have not been charged.”

There is no specific threat against Massachusetts right now, state police Lt. Col. Francis Hughes said yesterday.

“We are going to be vigilant with the way things are in the world,” he said. “We are regularly briefed by the JTTF (Joint Terrorism Task Force) and FBI on trends … but there is nothing specific right now that this state should be worried about.”.

The GWU researchers also found that there are 300 U.S.-based ISIS sympathizers on social media in charge of recruiting and spreading propaganda, mainly on Twitter.


By Brooke Knightley

At least 300 American citizens are serving as social media ambassadors for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), based on a recent report.

George Washington University's (GWU) Program on Extremism released a new report saying most of the American ISIS agents are female and they use the internet to spread extremist propaganda and recruit new members.

The report highlighted the important role of social media in the radicalization and mobilization of ISIS sympathizers in America.

While Twitter has been quick to suspend the accounts of suspected ISIS sympathizers, new accounts crop up within just a few hours to replace them. For six months, GWU researchers observed the Twitter profiles of 300 American ISIS sympathizers and took careful note of the avatars they chose. Many of those profiles contain black flags, green birds, and lions, according to the Independent Journal (IJ).
It is also worth noting that a third of the online accounts that GWU examined belong to female ISIS sympathizers. Their activities range from creating ISIS propaganda messages, retweeting content, and promoting new accounts which replaced suspended profiles.

The GWU report revealed that ISIS extremists meet potential recruits in person to strengthen the members' commitment. One member in Texas mingles with an Islamic studies organization and some charismatic people. Another group is made up of former friends from high school. This finding could be used to trace local networks of the terror group’s sympathizers, the report adds.

GWU Program on Extremism's director Lorenzo Vidino spoke about their findings on Tuesday.

"What we do see in the United States is an unprecedented mobilization..." the IJ quotes Vidino's statement on Tuesday. "It is not as big as some of the European countries that have been affected by the phenomenon, but it is, in a historical sense, unprecedented."

Since March 2014, federal authorities have charged 71 individuals with activities connected to ISIS. This year, they apprehended another 56 people who have supported or helped plan activities with the terrorist group.


By Wesley Bruer

Washington (CNN) Support for ISIS in America has reached an unprecedented level with several thousand U.S.-based sympathizers and more terrorism-related arrests in 2015 than any year since 9/11, according to a report by George Washington University's Program on Extremism.

The report noted that the average ISIS recruit is male and around 26 years old. It identified at least 300 Americans who actively support ISIS on social media and spread propaganda on the terror group’s behalf, with Twitter being the
preferred platform. In addition to those supporters, the FBI has previously said that they also have 900 open investigations into homegrown violent extremists, a majority being ISIS related.

Following the attack on Paris by ISIS which left 130 dead, the FBI honed in on 100 of those 900 investigations and took "them up a notch," according to FBI Director James Comey. The hardest task for federal law enforcement tracking these threats is prioritizing those they think are actually at risk of carrying out similar attacks over those that only consume the propaganda.

And while the U.S. only saw 15 arrests for ISIS related activities in 2014 that number has more than tripled with at least 56 people being charged in the U.S. so far in 2015.

Of those 71 total individuals arrested for their involvement or interest in joining ISIS since the terror group’s rise to prominence in early 2014, the vast majority of them were U.S. citizens or permanent residents, with the youngest suspect being 15. Their crimes ran the spectrum from the spreading of propaganda to actively seeking out weapons and co-conspirators to carry out an attack within the U.S.

Former intel chief: WH ignored ISIS

The breakdown of those arrested with ISIS related crimes also gives a glimpse into the motive behind those supporters, with only 27% plotting to carry out an attack in America and more than half traveling or attempting to travel abroad to join ISIS in Syria or Iraq.

Though the FBI believes that the trend of foreign fighters from the U.S. to Syria and Iraq is on the decline, it has been previously estimated by U.S. officials that more than 250 Americans have traveled to join ISIS with only a few dozen actually joining the ranks and about 20 have died fighting.


George Washington University's Program on Extremism
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By Molly Jackson

The 71 people who have been arrested on Islamic State (IS)-related charges in America since March 2014 come from a diverse array of backgrounds and motives, but share two things in common: radical ideology and a love of Twitter.

George Washington University's Center for Cyber and Homeland Security released "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," on Tuesday, a six-month study of more than 7,000 pages of documents cataloging who supports the terror group, how, and why. The report gives special focus to 300 known IS supporters active on Twitter, the militant group's most popular social media platform, "where they spasmodically create accounts that often get suspended in a never-ending cat-and-mouse game."

Although most online sympathizers "will never make the leap from talk to action, from being keyboard warriors to actual militancy," center director Lorenzo Vidino and deputy director Seamus Hughes use profiles of some of the 71 supporters arrested so far to illustrate that, although trends emerge, there is no "typical" IS supporter. This unpredictability has been a major challenge for counterterrorism officials struggling to catch up with online propaganda, which social media allows to be ever-more tailored to a specific recruit's needs and motives.

Many are young — the average age is 26 — and a disproportionate number are converts to Islam: 40 percent, versus roughly 23 percent of American Muslims as a whole. Most Twitter supporters use English, and 58 of the arrested suspects are US citizens. Six are permanent residents, and the nationality of the remaining seven is unknown. Half had traveled, or attempted to travel, to fight abroad.

Yet location, education, social class, ethnicity, and motivations "defy easy analysis," Dr. Vidino and Mr. Hughes write, noting that there are 900 ongoing investigations against Islamic State supporters, including at least one in each US state. Apart from a "search for belonging" or meaning, likely IS recruits share little in common, making it harder to predict who could present a threat.
Sympathizers' gender breakdown is also changing: although 86 percent of those arrested are male, about one-third of tracked supporters online are female.

Meanwhile, the growth of social media has made terrorism propaganda not only more accessible — "the terrorist is in your pocket," as FBI director James Comey told the Senate this summer — but more personalized for each Twitter user, increasing the chances he or she could be 'groomed' for recruitment.

The report divides IS-related US Twitter accounts into three categories: 'nodes,' who generate most of the original content and links to relevant articles; 'amplifiers,' who retweet the nodes' posts; and 'shout-outs,' a unique role that has sprung up as online platforms step up their efforts to remove terrorist accounts. Account suspensions, which have become a "badge of honor" for IS supporters, are quickly countered by the creation of new accounts, and "shoutouts" highlight a Twitter user's re-appearance to help them regain a following.

In many cases, online contact is reinforced with in-person meetings, or escalate to the creation of a small group.

The report's authors offer an example of online recruitment:

[The] seemingly naïve individual posted general questions about religion, to which ISIS supporters quickly responded in a calm and authoritative manner. After a few weeks, the accounts of hardened ISIS supporters slowly introduced increasingly ardent views into the conversation. The new recruit was then invited to continue the conversion privately, often via Twitter's Direct Message feature or on other private messaging platforms such as surespot.

As The Wall Street Journal reported last month, law enforcement agencies such as the FBI are increasingly calling for access to encrypted data in order to find the most serious recruits. Encrypted communication may have helped plan the Paris attacks in November, and Islamic State helps followers learn to hide their online activity.

But much of supporters' social media activity is legal, presenting an unprecedented and intensely taxing problem for intelligence and law enforcement officials.
"Bismillah. Kuffar spending millions while I spend less then [sic] 2 minutes to make another account," one Twitter account gloated, using an insulting word for non-Muslims.

"The Internet overhauled radicalization, and it should also upgrade the way we study it," writes Jane Harman, president of the Woodrow Wilson Center and a former congresswoman, in a foreword to the report.

George Washington's Vidino and Hughes recommend that the United States catch up in developing preventative and intervention strategies aimed at pulling young supporters away from the allure of Islamic State social media, drawing on outreach from potential recruits' families and communities, as well as disillusioned former supporters. The report also notes that many Muslims concerned about radicalization would like to combat IS online, but fear that their activity would be mistaken for support.

Prevention strategies are especially vital for Islamic State's youngest would-be supporters in America. Elsewhere, the report's authors have advised US officials to study some European models of intervention, which rely on community support and mentorship:

Critically, this process is seen as a way to protect youths rather than an intelligence gathering tool. Young people undergoing a process of radicalization are seen as vulnerable individuals harming themselves and ultimately in need of help. Radicalization is presented as a problem like gang recruitment or drugs. Just as they would do if they detected young people falling prey to such social ills, community leaders have a responsibility to report cases of radicalization.


There are 300 Islamic State sympathizers based in the United States who are active on social media, according to a new report by the Program on Extremism, at George Washington University.

The groundbreaking report, by Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, identifies 250 Americans who have attempted to join the Islamic State and 900 open FBI investigations relating to ISIS.
It analyzes the Islamic State’s presence in the United States, monitoring both online and offline activity and details case studies of individuals who have joined the Islamic State.

It’s broken down into two parts. The first exhaustively pulls together available information on all U.S. citizens who have been arrested for Islamic-State-related activity. The second examines motivations, including the role of social media.

"While jihadist causes have lured American recruits for several decades, the surge spurred by the rise of ISIS and its sophisticated marketing of its counter-culture to impressionable Americans is unprecedented" the report concludes.

"The data and vignettes provided in this report illuminate the complexity of the threat and caution against simple solutions. In their response to this challenge, American political and civic leaders will need to be bold, experimental, and receptive to novel policies and initiatives in order to defeat ISIS and protect some of our fellow citizens from falling into its clutches."

Read the full report: ISIS in America – From Retweets to Raqqa

Examiner: “New report reveals ISIS related number of arrests increasing”, December 2, 2015

By Lawrence Lease

Law enforcement across the country have arrested more than five dozen people in the U.S. for helping to support or plot with the Islamic State, according to a study by George Washington University released on Wednesday. The Islamic State recruits defy any single profile, the study found, though they are younger than previous terrorism suspects, are drawn heavily from converts to Islam and reflect increasingly prominent roles for women.

The report noted that the average ISIS recruit is male and around 26 years old. It identified at least 300 Americans who actively support ISIS on social media and spread propaganda on the terror group's behalf, with Twitter being the preferred platform. In addition to those supporters, the FBI has previously said
that they also have 900 open investigations into homegrown violent extremists, a majority being ISIS related.

Following the attack on Paris by ISIS which left 130 dead, the FBI honed in on 100 of those 900 investigations and took "them up a notch," according to FBI Director James Comey. The hardest task for federal law enforcement tracking these threats is prioritizing those they think are actually at risk of carrying out similar attacks over those that only consume the propaganda. While the U.S. only saw 15 arrests for ISIS related activities in 2014 that number has more than tripled with at least 56 people being charged in the U.S. so far in 2015.

Of those 71 total individuals arrested for their involvement or interest in joining ISIS since the terror group's rise to prominence in early 2014, the vast majority of them were U.S. citizens or permanent residents, with the youngest suspect being 15. Their crimes ran the spectrum from the spreading of propaganda to actively seeking out weapons and co-conspirators to carry out an attack within the U.S.

The people in the George Washington University study ranged from a 15-year-old boy to Tairod Pugh, a former Air Force officer who was 47 at the time of his arrest. The average age of the American supporter of the Islamic State was 26, the report found, reflecting a pattern unfolding in other Western countries as social media attracts younger recruits. John Carlin, the assistant attorney general for national security, has said that of the terrorism-related arrests in the last 18 months, mostly involving the Islamic State, 80 percent of those arrested were younger than 30, and 40 percent were younger than 21.

More than half of those charged were arrested in an operation involving an informant or an undercover agent, the report said, a tactic that has caused tensions between the FBI and some American Muslims.

Fox News: “Study finds 300 active ISIS supporters online in the US”, December 2, 2015

Approximately 300 American or U.S.-based ISIS sympathizers have been identified as active online recruiters for the terror group, according to a study released Tuesday.

Researchers at George Washington University’s Program on Extremism said that the recruiters primarily use Twitter to encourage like-minded individuals to travel

George Washington University's Program on Extremism 110
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to Iraq or Syria to join the self-proclaimed ISIS "caliphate", or to plan attacks within the U.S.

The study said that while the number of ISIS supporters is not as large in the U.S. as in other Western countries, "ISIS-related mobilization in the United States has been unprecedented." Citing American authorities, it said approximately 250 Americans had traveled or attempted to travel to Iraq or Syria, while 900 active investigations were in progress against ISIS sympathizers in all 50 states.

In one case, the study's authors said, "[a] seemingly naive individual posted general questions about religion [on Twitter], to which ISIS supporters quickly responded in a calm and authoritative manner. After a few weeks, the accounts of hardened ISIS supporters slowly introduced increasingly ardent views into the conversation."

"The new recruit was then invited to continue the conversion privately," the authors continued, "often via Twitter's Direct Message feature or on other private messaging platforms."

The study, titled "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa", also found that 71 people had been charged in the U.S. with ISIS-related activities since March 2014. 56 of those arrests have occurred since the start of 2015, the most terrorism-related arrests in any year since the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

In addition to online recruiters, the study also identifies several small groups of friends or acquaintances who support ISIS. One of the cells, the researchers said, is based in Texas and "revolves around a few charismatic individuals and an Islamic studies group." The second is located "in the suburbs of a large Midwestern city [and] appears to be composed of former high-school friends and a handful of their acquaintances."

The study's authors did not identify the groups further, saying they did not want to compromise potential criminal investigations.

The study finds that defendants accused of ISIS-supporting activities have an average age of 26 and are overwhelmingly male. Just over half had traveled or attempted to travel abroad, and approximately one quarter were involved in plots to attack the U.S.

"The profiles ... differ widely in race, age, social class, education, and family background," the study's executive summary said. "Their motivations are equally diverse and defy easy analysis."
The summary added that U.S.-based sympathizers’ actual involvement with ISIS ranged from "those who are merely inspired by its message to those few who reached mid-level leadership positions within the group."

Free Beacon: “22-Year-Old California Man Pleads Guilty to Terrorism Charge”, December 2, 2015

By Morgan Chalfant

Nicholas Teausant, the National Guard reservist who was arrested last year for trying to blow up the Los Angeles subway, pleaded guilty to a federal terrorism charge for trying to join the Islamic State.

According to the Los Angeles Times, the 22-year-old former community college student was charged with trying to give material support or resources to a foreign terrorist organization.

“This case, like others in communities across the United States and around the world, is an example of how a young person from any place and any background might make the terrible decision to try and become part of a terrorist organization,” Benjamin B. Wagner, the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of California, said in a written statement.

“Fortunately, the FBI intervened in this case before any harm could be inflicted upon innocent persons.”

Teausant, a former student at San Joaquin Delta College, faces as many as 15 years in jail and a $250,000 fine. His sentencing is scheduled for March 8.

Teausant was arrested in March 2014 in Washington state. According to federal officials, he planned to cross into Canada and join the Islamic State in Syria, but was apprehended after discussing his intentions with an FBI informant who was posing as a radical Islamist.

The affidavit stated that Teausant told the FBI informant that he and his friends discussed blowing up the Los Angeles subway system on New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day, a plan that was eventually called off. He also later told the informant and an undercover officer that he intended to join and fight with the “brothers” abroad.
Teausant allegedly possessed manuals on how to be a “lone wolf” terrorist and contributed frequently to online forums for would-be terrorists, according to FBI court documents from last year.

There have been a number of terrorism-related arrests in the United States in recent weeks. Last month, a 25-year-old Ohio resident who expressed support for the Islamic State was arrested for soliciting the murder of 100 U.S. military members. The week prior, four men were charged in Ohio for supporting now-deceased al Qaeda operative Anwar al-Awlaki.

A report released Tuesday from George Washington University’s program on extremism said that the Islamic State has “unprecedented” support in the U.S. In the wake of the deadly terrorist attacks in Paris for which the terror group claimed responsibility, the Islamic State has threatened attacks in America.


Seventy-one Americans have been arrested for ISIS-related activities since March 2014, and they come from varied backgrounds and ethnicities and identify broad motivations for supporting ISIS, according to a new report from the George Washington University’s Program on Extremism.

One of those charged for ISIS-related activities is a Mexican-American convert from Houston. Another is a former Air Force officer from Brooklyn. The youngest was arrested at 15 years old.

The report, “ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa,” attempts to understand why these individuals became radicalized by analyzing every ISIS-related court case from the last 21 months.

Program Director Lorenzo Vidino and Deputy Director Seamus Hughes presented the findings to the public Tuesday. The report describes ISIS’s use of social media to attract American recruits.
Fifty-six individuals were arrested for ISIS-related activities this year alone—a record for terrorism arrests since 9/11, the report says.

Dr. Vidino and Mr. Hughes examined more than 7,000 court documents and found that the average age of an American ISIS supporter is 26. They are overwhelmingly males (86 percent). A majority of individuals charged have been U.S. citizens.

Dr. Vidino said the level of radical involvement differed in each case. Some individuals acting alone only “flirted” with extremist ideologies online. But others were far more committed.

“You cannot put the kid who radicalizes in his parents’ basement and has never really interacted with the real deal… with people who have physically gone to Syria and Iraq and have reached some pretty senior status, in some cases, in the organization,” Dr. Vidino said.

The report also elucidates the power of social media and how ISIS has attracted American recruits to its radical ideologies online.

Researchers described ISIS online communities as echo chambers, where participants reinforce each other’s beliefs. Some ISIS Twitter accounts function as “nodes” or leading voices that generate content for networks. “Amplifiers” retweet and reshare material from other popular ISIS members, and “shout-out accounts” keep the online community connected by creating new accounts if users are suspended.

But Dr. Vidino added that radicalization isn’t limited to the online world. In Minneapolis, close-knit neighborhoods of people connected by ethnic and community ties have seen extremism take hold. Authorities also caught a small group from a Bosnian community in St. Louis sending money to Syrian fighters.
Leveraging community networks may be one of the most effective ways to mitigate radicalization, said Michael Downing, commanding officer of the Counter-Terrorism and Special Operations Bureau at the Los Angeles Police Department. He shared that local law enforcement can work with communities to create partnerships, civic engagement and problem-solving efforts together, since they have the best understanding of neighborhood landscapes.

Ambassador Alberto Fernandez, the former coordinator of the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications at the U.S. Department of State, emphasized that community engagement is especially important as ISIS bolsters its virtual stronghold.

This year alone, ISIS created media in nine different languages and produced almost 1,800 propaganda videos, 14,523 graphics and 50 songs, Mr. Fernandez said. The ISIS image has to be cracked, and community leaders can add their voices to introduce new counter narratives to the organization's brand.

“They need to be seen as and, actually be, losers. That is the single most powerful thing that can be done to take some of the air out of their message,” he said.


A new study offers what its authors describe is the first comprehensive review of Americans who have been recruited by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The study is based on legal records and social media research conducted by the George Washington University’s Program on Extremism. The report, ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa, examined social media accounts and legal documents of nearly 400 Americans who sympathize with ISIS.

“The phenomenon of Americans joining jihadist groups is not new, but the size of the ISIS-related radicalization and mobilization is unprecedented,” said Lorenzo Vidino, director of the GW’s Program on Extremism.
The study finds the following characteristics of ISIS U.S. sympathizers, based on information included in legal documents:

Their average age is 26
More than 50 percent traveled or attempted to travel abroad
Authorities have made arrests in twenty-one states
40 percent converted to Islam
14 percent are female

GW says that the report examined more than 7,000 pages of legal documents related to the seventy-one individuals charged with ISIS-related activities in the United States. It found that the profiles of individuals involved in ISIS-related activities in the United States differ widely in race, age, social class, education, and family background. Their motivations are equally diverse. The report says there have been active investigations in all fifty states, and U.S. law enforcement officials have made arrests in twenty-one states. It notes the highest number of ISIS recruits were charged in New York and Minnesota.

“Other than size, diversity is the other main characteristic of this phenomenon. We have seen cases in big cities and rural towns. The individuals involved range from hardened militants to teenage girls, petty criminals and college students,” Dr. Vidino said. “While some seek to join the self-declared caliphate in ISIS-controlled territory, others plan attacks within the United States. It’s a growing and disturbing phenomenon.”

The Program on Extremism monitored nearly 300 Twitter accounts of U.S.-based ISIS sympathizers during the six-month study. This activity showed how social media plays a crucial role in the radicalization and, at times, mobilization of U.S.-based ISIS sympathizers.

“ISIS and its supporters are adept at using social media to radicalize and recruit Americans,” said Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the GW’s Program on Extremism. “A small number of Americans have whole-heartedly embraced their new-found ISIS support system online. The bar for Americans to join these terrorist organizations has been lowered, allowing a level of connectivity and interaction with recruiters and propagandists unheard of just a few years ago.”

The Program on Extremism will publish some of the legal documents used to compile the report on its Web site. This will be one of the largest online collections of ISIS-related legal documents on American cases.
GW notes that the paper concludes with policy recommendations, including increased resources devoted to countering violent extremism, a framework for targeted interventions with radicalized individuals and legal guidance for people interested in sharing messages countering ISIS propaganda.

Huffington Post: “ISIS Sympathizers In The U.S. Are Mostly Young, Male And American”, December 2, 2015

By Nick Robins-Earlly

After the Paris attacks renewed fears of terror plots in the United States, a new study by George Washington University’s Program on Extremism offers one of the most comprehensive looks to date at the Islamic State militant group’s alleged U.S. supporters.

While people charged with crimes related to supporting the militant group don’t share any one particular background, ethnicity or place of origin, the study shows that the majority of these individuals are young, male and American citizens.

Since March of 2014, the U.S. has charged a total of 71 people for offenses related to involvement with the Islamic State militant group, according to the study.

Around 86 percent of those arrested are men. Their average age is 26 and the vast majority of them are U.S. citizens. Despite these similarities, however, there are huge differences in their backgrounds.

"They’re old, they’re young. They’re rich, they’re poor. They’re high school kids, they’re college-educated," Seamus Hughes, a co-author of the report and deputy director of the Program on Extremism, told The WorldPost.

"It really runs the gamut when you look at the actual cases of people who have been arrested in the U.S."

Hughes, fellow author Lorenzo Vidino and a team of researchers analyzed thousands of pages of legal documents to see who was being arrested for connections to ISIS in the United States. The team also conducted interviews with prosecutors, journalists and the families of the suspects.
What Hughes and Vidino found defied "any cookie-cutter profile of the American ISIS supporter," the report states. But the report’s finding about the average age of the suspects does appear to indicate a shift from past terrorism-related arrests in the U.S.

"The big takeaway is that in terms of legal cases, they’re trending younger," Hughes said. "The average age is 26, but in one-third of the cases, they were 21 years or younger."

Three of the arrested suspects were under 17 years old. The youngest was an unnamed 15-year-old boy. And overall, the arrests weren't concentrated in one area of the country, but rather took place in 21 different states.

In addition to having diverse backgrounds, suspected ISIS supporters in the U.S. are believed to aid the terror organization in a variety of ways, the report states.

“You have so-called "keyboard warriors" -- individuals that are in their parents' house tweeting out ISIS propaganda," Hughes said. "On the other side of the spectrum, you have someone like Abdullah Pazara, who was a mid-level commander in Syria."

The study also notes that over 250 Americans have either successfully joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq, or have attempted to do so. That number is significant, but pales in comparison to the number of recruits in parts of Europe and North Africa, where, in some countries, over a thousand citizens have left to fight for extremists.

The Program on Extremism study echoes the findings of previous analyses of foreign fighters, which show that individuals join the Islamic State militant group for a multitude of reasons.

"Foreign fighters are not a monolithic entity, and not every one of them is like the guys you see in recruitment videos," said Peter Neumann, director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization, in an interview with The WorldPost last year.

"Young people are going, quite old people are going, even women are going. Their motivations vary as well."

The Program on Extremism report also documents the pervasive use of social media among suspected ISIS supporters in America, and notes that around 40
percent are converts to Islam. It also finds that over half of the ISIS-related terror arrests since 2014 came via informants or undercover officers.

This use of paid informants is a controversial practice. Critics accuse the FBI of using informants to cajole vulnerable individuals into carrying out plots they would not have pursued otherwise.

Taken together, the report's findings illustrate the complex and varied ways that hundreds of Americans could become enamored of a brutal terrorist group.

"When we think of ISIS recruitment in America, it defies easy analysis," Hughes said.

The Horn News: “[Alert] 300 ISIS recruiters are in America”, December 2, 2015

Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stood before the House Armed Services Committee yesterday and admitted that the Obama administration has “not contained [ISIS].”

And that just may turn out to be the understatement of the year.

According to a new report from the George Washington University Program on Extremism, ISIS is not just unconstrained. The terror group actually has hundreds of members and sympathizers actively operating and recruiting in America.

The program says it has identified at least 300 active, American-based ISIS social media accounts that are patrolling the Internet.

Their goal is, in part, to recruit home-grown terrorists every day, and help these recruits kill and terrorize Americans.

“ISIS-related mobilization in the United States has been unprecedented,” the report states. In addition to the 300-plus ISIS accounts on social media, as of this fall approximately 250 Americans have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria or Iraq to join ISIS.

But with social media, ISIS’ American operatives can make contact with people in every part of the country even with just a few hundred accounts.

“Social media plays a crucial role in the radicalization and, at times, mobilization of U.S.-based ISIS sympathizers,” according to the report. “The Program on
Extremism has identified some 300 American and/or U.S.-based ISIS sympathizers active on social media, spreading propaganda, and interacting with like-minded individuals. Some members of this online echo chamber eventually make the leap from keyboard warriors to actual militancy.”

Since March 2014, 71 Americans have been charged with ISIS-related activities. Of those, 56 have been arrested in 2015 alone. That’s a record number of terrorism-related arrests for any year since 9/11.

Those arrested fit a wide profile. The average age of those caught is 26, and 86 percent are male. Just over half traveled or attempted to travel abroad, and over a quarter were seeking to commit acts of terror on American soil.

The Independent: “Isis: Hundreds of Americans ‘sympathise with terror group’ on Twitter, study finds”, December 2, 2015

By Victoria Richards

Several hundred American people are using social media platforms such as Twitter to spread messages of support and instigate recruitment for Isis, a new study has revealed.

The report, ‘Isis in America: From Retweets to Raqqa’, was been released by George Washington University’s programme on extremism.

It analysed the social media accounts and legal documents of more than 300 Isis activists and sympathisers in the US for a period of six months, and found: those users have an average age of 26, 14 per cent are female, two out of every five are Muslim converts and more than half have either travelled or tried to travel abroad.

The study also revealed that while many American Isis supporters use private messaging apps, open forums and the dark web, they are almost overwhelmingly drawn to Twitter - where there is a thriving “American Isis Twitter scene”, the Guardian reported.

According to the report:
• Nearly 1/3 of the tracked accounts are purportedly operated by women.

• Most American Isis supporters online communicate in English.

• Many accounts use avatars of black flags, lions, and green birds (a symbol of martyrs).

• Avatars also feature Americans arrested on terrorism charges, killed waging jihad abroad, or committing attacks in the US.

The researchers also found that being suspended on Twitter had become a so-called “badge of honour”. According to the report, American supporters "spasmodically create accounts that often get suspended in a never-ending cat-and-mouse game”.

In order to identify the accounts, researchers looked at those who self-identified as being American, while also using Twitter’s geo-location tagging tool, the use of the words "the American" in Arabic on Twitter bios, and language, spelling and cultural references.

They then broke down the selected Twitter accounts into three categories: nodes - leading voices who create most of the pro-Isis content; amplifiers - who tend only to retweet and “like” material from popular users; and shout-out accounts - who have the largest followings on Twitter. The last group was responsible for introducing new, pro-Isis accounts to the community and actively promoting new accounts created by previously-suspended users.

One example, as outlined by the Guardian, was the case of newlyweds Mohammad Oda Dakhalla, 22, who was about to start studying at graduate school, and his 19-year-old wife, Jaelyn Delshaun Young, a chemistry student and the daughter of a police officer.

The couple planned a secret honeymoon to travel to Syria to join Isis, but their radical activity on Twitter attracted the attention of the FBI and they were arrested earlier this year.

Lorenzo Vidino, the co-author of the report, told the Guardian: “It is an internet community with different roles and personalities, just like you have a community of Justin Bieber fans.

“They’re getting better and better at it and there’s much more coordination than we thought.”
A total of 56 people have so far been arrested in the US in 2015 due to Isis-related activities, the IB Times reported.

And while most had been radicalised online, the report said a number of US extremists "cultivated and later strengthened their interest in Isis's narrative through face-to-face relationships - in most cases online and offline dynamics complement one another".

The study, however, concluded that the presence of US sympathisers online is "significantly smaller, more decentralised, and less professional than that of most European countries".

Politico: “Pentagon to expand special operations against ISIL”, December 2, 2015

By Jeremy Herb

U.S. TO DEPLOY NEW ‘TARGETING FORCE’ AGAINST THE ISLAMIC STATE: Defense Secretary Ash Carter says the U.S. is looking for opportunities to “expand” U.S. special operations in Syria and is planning to deploy troops to conduct raids in both Syria and Iraq. Our colleague Austin Wright has more from Tuesday’s hearing: “Testifying before the House Armed Services Committee, Carter said a new ‘specialized expeditionary targeting force’ will be sent to Iraq and ‘will over time be able to conduct raids, free hostages, gather intelligence and capture’ leaders of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

“The raids in Iraq will be done at the invitation of the Iraqi government and focused on defending its borders and building the [Iraqi Security Forces’] own capacity,’ Carter said. ‘This force will also be in a position to conduct unilateral operations into Syria.’ He noted President Barack Obama’s decision last month to authorize up to 50 special operations troops to be deployed northern Syria to assist rebel groups there — and suggested the mission could be expanded.”

— REPUBLICANS AREN’T SO IMPRESSED: Republican presidential hopeful Jeb Bush said it was a necessary step but not enough. “We need special forces, for sure,” the former Florida governor said on Fox News Radio. “But when you tie the arms or tie the hands behind the backs of the military and put
preconditions on what they can and can’t do, you get the result we have today. And this reluctance to lead is a dangerous one.”

And Senate Armed Services Chairman John McCain (R-Ariz.) told reporters the Obama administration is reacting and on the defensive because it has no strategy against the Islamic State. “Ash Carter today said they’re going to step up their activities — that’s the classic example of a lack of a strategy,” McCain said. “He is reacting to the Paris attacks, not acting in the formulation and implementation of a strategy.”

— OBAMA WARNS THAT PUTIN RISKS A NEW AFGHANISTAN, via POLITICO’s Edward-Isaac Dovere: “Vladimir Putin’s leadership evokes Soviet-style politics and posturing. On Tuesday, President Barack Obama suggested he take lessons from Soviet military history, too. For years, Obama has followed a ‘laissez-fail’ policy for Syria's Bashar Assad — a hands-off waiting for him to fall from power — that has been driven by what he considered the wrongheaded, and costly, American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq under George W. Bush. Similarly, Obama said, when Putin weighs his decision to intervene to support Assad in Syria, he should keep in mind the Soviet Union’s own no-win intervention in Afghanistan, which began in 1979 and lasted nine long and bloody years.”

— KERRY: WE CAN DEFEAT ISIL ‘IF WE GET OUR ACT TOGETHER’: Secretary of State John Kerry gave an interview to Rolling Stone where he sounded an optimistic note toward defeating the Islamic State — if the world powers unite to do it. POLITICO’s Eliza Collins has more: “In an interview with Rolling Stone, the secretary of state said that there is no alternative to beating ISIL, but said it isn’t the U.S. that ultimately holds the cards. ‘Of course, it’s possible. Whether it happens or not is up to Iran and Russia,’ Kerry said.”

HAPPY WEDNESDAY AND WELCOME TO MORNING DEFENSE, where we’re heading to our first holiday party tonight. They always start out so cheerful, but check with us in three weeks. Email us tips, pitches and your favorite holiday get-togethers at jherb@politico.com, and follow on Twitter @jeremyherb, @morningdefense and @politicopro.

HAPPENING TODAY — JAMES TO TALK AIR FORCE: Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James speaks at the National Press Club this afternoon on the biggest issues facing the Air Force. She’ll discuss budget cuts, sexual assault and other issues, according to the Press Club’s advisory. And there’ll be plenty of questions.
ALSO TODAY: The Senate Armed Services Committee holds a hearing on personnel reform and “strengthening the all-volunteer force,” with former Pentagon Comptroller Robert Hale among those testifying. And the Center for Strategic and International Studies talks the defense budget and industry at an event this morning with Aerospace Industries Association CEO David Melcher.

BUDGET BATTLES — FORBES PITCHES SUBMARINE FUND AS A MONEY SAVER: Our colleague Wright reports on a new argument from Rep. Randy Forbes (R-Va.) in the battle over using a “National Sea-Based Deterrence Fund” for new submarines replacing the Navy’s aging Ohio-class ballistic missile boomers: “Forbes is pitching a controversial plan to fund a new class of nuclear submarines as a money-saver as he gears up for another battle next year with members of the powerful House Appropriations Committee.”

“The defense-wide fund for the Ohio-class replacement submarines would be separate from the Navy’s normal shipbuilding account — essentially forcing the Army and Air Force to subsidize a program projected to cost $100 billion or more. For that reason, top members of the Appropriations Committee sought to eliminate the fund in this year’s House defense spending bill, but they were overruled in June through an amendment by Forbes and [Rep. Joe] Courtney [D-Conn.] that kept the fund intact. On Tuesday, the congressman began making a new argument: The defense-wide fund could save the Pentagon billions of dollars.”

— RYAN WANTS UNITY ON UPCOMING SPENDING BILL, via POLITICO’s Jake Sherman: “Speaker Paul Ryan privately implored House Republicans to stay unified when a government funding bill comes to the floor next week, while urging his colleagues to ‘keep your schedules flexible, we’re not going to allow Democrats to use the calendar against us.’ The private comments, relayed by a source in the closed party meeting, reflect Ryan’s (R-Wis.) desire to keep the GOP together ahead of the Dec. 11 funding deadline.”

COSTS PROMPT WHITE HOUSE TO REJECT PENTAGON PLAN TO CLOSE GITMO: The Wall Street Journal reports on the Pentagon’s estimated $600 million plan to close the U.S. military prison: “The Pentagon’s latest cost estimate for closing the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and building an alternative in the U.S. topped a half billion dollars, prompting the White House to reject it and send the plan back for revisions, according to administration officials. The cost dispute marked a setback for a top priority of President Barack
Obama, and helps account for the administration’s delay in submitting a plan to Congress for closing Guantanamo.”

WAR REPORT — IRAQI FORCES SURROUND RAMADI: But the Iraqi military’s fight to retake the city from the Islamic State could be a long siege, reports The Associated Press: “After months of sluggish progress, stalled advances and outright failures, Iraqi troops and militias backed by U.S.-led airstrikes have surrounded the key city of Ramadi and appear poised to launch a new attempt to wrest it from the Islamic State group. The battle that is shaping up threatens to turn into a drawn-out siege, with thousands of residents caught in the middle as the forces try to wear down the militants since they took over the capital of western Anbar province in May.”

— ISLAMIC STATE MILITANTS PREVENT CIVILIANS FROM FLEEING RAMADI, via the WSJ: “Islamic State fighters are preventing civilians from fleeing the city of Ramadi on pain of death after Iraqi forces warned people to leave ahead of an impending offensive, residents said Tuesday. Iraqi forces have been air-dropping leaflets since Sunday warning residents to leave ahead of an operation to recapture the Islamic State stronghold. Residents said the extremist group wants to use civilians as human shields.”

— IRAQIS THINK THE U.S. IS WORKING WITH ISIL, reports The Washington Post’s Liz Sly: “On the front lines of the battle against the Islamic State, suspicion of the United States runs deep. Iraqi fighters say they have all seen the videos purportedly showing U.S. helicopters airdropping weapons to the militants, and many claim they have friends and relatives who have witnessed similar instances of collusion. Ordinary people also have seen the videos, heard the stories and reached the same conclusion — one that might seem absurd to Americans but is widely believed among Iraqis — that the United States is supporting the Islamic State for a variety of pernicious reasons that have to do with asserting U.S. control over Iraq, the wider Middle East and, perhaps, its oil.”

STUDY FINDS ISIL MOBILIZATION IN U.S. ‘UNPRECEDENTED’: A six-month study of Americans recruited to join the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant calls the terrorist group’s “mobilization” in the United States “unprecedented.” The study by George Washington University’s Program on Extremism examined social media accounts and legal documents of nearly 400 Americans who sympathize with ISIL. It found Americans involved in the group “differ widely in race, age, social class, education and family background.”

George Washington University’s Program on Extremism
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@GWUPoE - https://cchs.gwu.edu/program-extremism
MAKING MOVES

— VICKERS JOINS BAE BOARD: Former Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence Michael Vickers has joined the board of directors of BAE Systems, the company is announcing today. Vickers is being appointed to a three-year term that began Dec. 1, BAE said. Vickers was undersecretary for intelligence from 2011 through this year, when he left the Pentagon.

— STRATFOR FOUNDER LAUNCHES NEW COMPANY: George Friedman, who founded the global intelligence company Stratfor two decades ago, is launching a new company, Geopolitical Futures, an online, subscription-based publication that will provide forward-looking analysis of global affairs. Geopolitical Futures is publishing a forecast of its 2016 predictions to coincide with today’s launch.

— CNAS ADDS JAMES MURDOCH TO ITS BOARD, via POLITICO’s Hadas Gold: “James Murdoch, CEO of 21st Century Fox and son of Rupert Murdoch, has joined the board of Center for a New American Security, the think tank announced Tuesday. ... Beyond his work with 21st Century Fox, Murdoch is the non-executive director of Yankee Global Enterprises and Vice Media and is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Ghetto Film School.”

SPEED READ

— The head of a Taliban splinter organization aligned with the Islamic State was killed last month in a gunfight with core Taliban fighters: The New York Times

— A U.S. Marine is convicted of killing a woman in the Philippines last year after he discovered she was transgender: The Washington Post

— Retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, Obama’s former top military intelligence official, says the White House ignored early reports on the rise of the Islamic State because they did not fit their re-election narrative: CNN

— A group of Taliban-aligned militants has held an American man hostage for more than a year: The Daily Beast

— NATO allies will assist Turkey with air defenses after the Turkish military shot down a Russian warplane that had reportedly entered its airspace: Reuters

— Syria says a deal has been reached for opposition fighters to withdraw from Homs with their weapons as part of a cease-fire agreement: Reuters
— Russia begins construction of military bases on islands claimed by Japan: Agence France-Presse

— Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh says “virtually every mission area” in the Air Force is facing personnel shortages: Military Times

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE POND: POLITICO PRO EUROPE BRIEF — POLITICO Pro, POLITICO’s premium subscription service, has teamed up with POLITICO Europe to bring you POLITICO Pro Europe Brief. If you’re engaged in international affairs or responsible for monitoring European policy and politics to determine their influence on the U.S., Pro’s Europe Brief is for you. Written through an American lens, the Europe Brief draws on POLITICO resources in both Brussels and D.C. to track and translate key policy and regulatory developments and their impact on the U.S Bonus: Try it for free! Download a complimentary issue of Europe Brief today.

Politico: “Fwd.us eyes 2016 campaigns for next big push”, December 2015

By Kate Tummarello and Alex Byers

FWD.US RAMPS UP 2016 CAMPAIGN PLANS — The Mark Zuckerberg-funded immigration lobbying group Fwd.us has been pretty quiet since its pricey efforts to convince Congress to pass reform legislation failed, but that’s about to change, reports POLITICO’s Anna Palmer. The group is “launching a multi-pronged campaign that could spend as much as $10 million over the next year on digital and TV ads, research and polling,” which would include “an expansion of its ground operation into 12 states, focusing on presidential battlegrounds and targeted House seats held by Republicans.”

“Fwd.us is looking to counter the anti-immigration reform rhetoric in the GOP primary, and lay the groundwork for an overhaul to the country’s immigration laws in early 2017 once the next president takes office,” Palmer writes. More for Pros.
PROGRESSIVE GROUPS FEAR NET NEUTRALITY RIDER — Liberal public interest groups are putting the heat on Sen. Barbara Mikulski, the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, trying to convince her to torpedo any efforts to stick net neutrality language in a forthcoming government spending bill. The groups are asking supporters in Maryland to email her about their worries. They’ve got some reason to be worried, according to HuffPo’s Amanda Terkel, who wrote Tuesday that an anti-rate regulation rider included in a previous version of the House’s spending bill appears to be sticking around.

“Net Neutrality is at very real risk this week — and one call right now from you can help save it,” the groups wrote in one email blast. "Corporate lobbyists are hoping that while Congress is swept up in fights over the fate of Syrian refugees and Planned Parenthood, they can sneak in giveaways for their industries."

Mikulski isn’t really susceptible to electoral pressure since she’s not running for reelection, so it’s not clear how well this push will work. The groups are arguing that “what she does here will impact her legacy.” No word from the Mikulski spokesperson we contacted, but we’re tracking.

GOOD WEDNESDAY MORNING and welcome to Morning Tech where we are intrigued by this local news item, which brings together two of our favorite things: baked goods and FOIA requests. Tell us what you would contribute to the bake sale when you send tips to abyers@politico.com and ktummarello@politico, and catch the full team’s info after speed read.

TODAY: SPECTRUM, BROADBAND Markup ON TAP — The House Energy and Commerce communications subcommittee is taking up two bipartisan bills this morning: the Federal Spectrum Incentive Act (H.R. 1641), which gives federal agencies a financial incentive to give up airwaves, and a new broadband infrastructure draft bill that combines a number of broadband proposals, including Rep. Anna Eshoo’s “dig once” bill.

MT hears the meeting will be quick and no amendments expected. But not everyone is kumbaya-ing yet. Chairman Greg Walden will note in an opening statement that he has heard “significant concerns on the part of electric utilities with respect to the proposed changes to utility pole attachments.” He pledged to continue working on the bill and make sure whatever moves out of committee “meets the needs of utilities and broadband providers, alike.”
There’s no Senate companion for the broadband infrastructure package yet, but Senate Commerce Chairman John Thune told MT he’s generally supportive. “Everybody is kind of on the same page,” he said, adding that committee staffs in both chambers have been working on the issue. “We all want to end up with some legislation that creates better conditions for advancing investment in not only fixed [broadband] but also wireless.”

** A Message from Pandora: ** Over 1,600 voters were asked about streaming music. The results show overwhelmingly that: 1) voters have used streaming services, 2) they believe legal access to music should be widely available, and 3) free-to-the-listener music services are important to consumers. Learn more: [http://bit.ly/1T1uk6U](http://bit.ly/1T1uk6U)**

**COPYRIGHT OFFICE MODERNIZATION HITS THE HILL** — Concerns about whether the U.S. Copyright Office can "meet the demands of the digital age" is the subject of a Committee on House Administration hearing this morning. The top slot at the Library of Congress is still vacant, but acting Librarian of Congress David Mao will be testifying. Look for him to field questions about whether the Copyright Office should, as some in the content industries hope, be spun out into its own agency or sub-agency. Many in tech would prefer the Copyright Office stay housed in the Library, even if it is somewhat technologically challenged. Joining Mao at the witness table are Register of Copyrights Maria Pallante and a GAO IT expert. We’re tracking.

**FIRST IN MT: MARKEY, BARTON PRESS VTech ON HACKING** — Sen. Ed Markey and Rep. Joe Barton are sending a letter to electronic toy company VTech, pressing them for information on how it collects and protects children’s data and its compliance with the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act after reports that the company suffered a data breach that affected the data of more than 6 million of its young users. "Among many requirements, COPPA requires these operators to notify parents and obtain consent from them before collecting personal information from children, as well as take reasonable steps to protect the confidentiality, security, and integration of personal information collected about children," the pair write.

**AT&T: WE’VE SHELVED IDEAS THANKS TO NET NEUTRALITY RULES** — The FCC’s new net neutrality rules have created enough legal uncertainty that AT&T has paused plans to offer some new services, AT&T Senior Vice President Bob Quinn said Tuesday. He didn’t provide any details. There’s no way AT&T would have been able to first offer something like T-
Mobile’s Binge On video streaming plan, since the company couldn’t predict how the FCC would respond, Quinn said at the Phoenix Center’s annual symposium.

"Since the Open Internet order came out we’ve had weekly calls with the business units and literally 15 lawyers who are all trying to figure out whether that stuff we've invested in ... would be a violation of the order," he said. "We've had to shelve a bunch of stuff because we've got to wait and see."

**Don’t forget:** The net neutrality rules go to court (again) on Friday for oral arguments at the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals.

**ALL ABOARD THE TRADE SECRETS TRAIN** — The Senate Judiciary Committee takes up the issue of trade secrets this morning, notably on the Defend Trade Secrets Act (S. 1890), a bill from Sens. Orrin Hatch and Chris Coons that would let companies go after thieves in federal court. Ranking member Patrick Leahy will say he has “heard from businesses, practitioners, and law enforcement experts” that the bill would help reduce hurdles facing companies when information is stolen from across state lines. A wide coalition of companies and trade groups are sending a new letter to the Hill this morning expressing support for the bill. Signatories include Adobe, Microsoft, IBM and Intel, as well as the Internet Commerce Coalition, which had previously expressed concerns about the bill.

Representing the opposing side is Hamline University School of Law Professor Sharon Sandeen, who co-authored a letter last month criticizing the bill and is warning it “will not solve the problems” of cyber espionage but “is likely to create new problems that could adversely impact domestic innovation, increase the duration and cost of trade secret litigation, and ultimately negatively affect economic growth.”

‘FROM KEYBOARD WARRIORS TO BATTLEFIELD COMMANDERS’ — A new report from George Washington University’s Program on Extremism explores how ISIL backers in the U.S. are using social media, finding that "Twitter is by far the platform of choice of this informal echo chamber." What’s more, those users — or "nodes," as the study calls them — have mastered the art of the shoutout, or pointing users to new versions of deleted accounts, and thus thwarting attempts to scrub terroristic content from the platform. The report, "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," can be found here: [http://bit.ly/1YF65iI](http://bit.ly/1YF65iI).
— **TWITTER’S TAKE:** “Like people around the world, we are horrified by the atrocities recently perpetrated by extremist groups and their ripple effects on the Internet,” a Twitter spokesperson emailed in response to the GW report. “We have teams around the world actively investigating reports of rule violations, and they work with law enforcement entities around the world when appropriate.”

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR SENATE COMMERCE MARKUP** — The Senate Commerce Committee holds its next markup Wednesday, Dec. 9. Chairman Thune told MT on Tuesday that the markup will include FCC Democratic Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel’s renomination. He is also hopeful his spectrum proposal — the MOBILE NOW Act, which was initially slated to be marked up last month — will be ready to move.

**Negotiations over the bill are “ongoing,”** he said, citing changes aimed at satisfying concerns from the administration and the Senate Armed Services Committee. “We’ve accepted a lot of things and we dropped some things that [the administration] didn’t want to see in there,” he said. He’s eyeing “some adjustments” to the amount of federally held spectrum agencies are required to make available under the bill.

**ICYMI: HOUSE JUDICIARY TO HOLD ENCRYPTION BRIEFINGS** — The House Judiciary Committee will hold member briefings about encryption, Kate reported Tuesday. The dual briefings will include government agencies and tech industry representatives. [More for Pros.]

**STAT OF THE DAY: 1 OUT OF 8** — That’s how many pay-TV subscribers have been affected by TV blackouts this year, according to the American TV Alliance, which represents cable and satellite companies in the fight over retransmission consent reform. The FCC is currently weighing whether or how to update the retrans process, which has prompted plenty of lobbying on both sides. Case in point: TVFreedom, which represents broadcasters, disputed the ATVA’s new stat, calling it “ridiculous,” since “broadcast program disruptions are provoked by the shenanigans of monopolistic pay TV companies who use TV viewers as pawns in their Washington games.”

**ZUCKERBABY ARRIVES, PROMPTLY LOSES FORTUNE** — Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and his wife, Dr. Priscilla Chan, announced the birth of their adorable daughter, Max, in a post Tuesday, along with a [lengthy letter](https://theintercept.com/2015/12/01/mark-zuckerberg-priscilla-chan-letter-daughter-max/) to her explaining their desire to “advance human potential and promote equality for all children in the next generation.” They’ll start by donating 99 percent of their fortune to...
Zuckerberg’s Facebook shares — worth about $45 billion — to charitable purposes before they die.

**NEWS FROM ACROSS THE POND: POLITICO PRO EUROPE BRIEF** — POLITICO Pro, POLITICO’s premium subscription service, has teamed up with POLITICO Europe to bring you POLITICO Pro Europe Brief. If you’re engaged in international affairs or responsible for monitoring European policy and politics to determine their influence on the U.S., Pro’s Europe Brief is for you. Written through an American lens, the Europe Brief draws on POLITICO resources in both Brussels and D.C. to track and translate key policy and regulatory developments and their impact on the U.S Bonus: Try it for free! Download a complimentary issue of Europe Brief today.

**SPEED READ:**

YAHOO BOARD WEIGHING SALE. The Yahoo Board of Directors will meet this week to consider selling the company’s Web properties and spinning off its investment in Alibaba, The Wall Street Journal reports: [http://on.wsj.com/1QcLtLK](http://on.wsj.com/1QcLtLK)

AIRBNB RELEASES DATA ON NYC USERS. Short-term rental platform Airbnb released anonymized data about its hosts in New York City, according to The New York Times: [http://nyti.ms/1lurInd](http://nyti.ms/1lurInd)

AT&T, NETFLIX, PINTEREST, YAHOO SUED FOR INFRINGEMENT. A firm in Texas is suing a slew of tech and retail companies for allegedly infringing on its encryption patents, ArsTechnica reports: [http://bit.ly/1PsBd3C](http://bit.ly/1PsBd3C)

THE MAN BEHIND THE $70K LEGEND. Bloomberg takes a look at the inconsistencies in the story of credit card processing company CEO Dan Price, who made news earlier this year when he announced he would raise all employees’ salaries to $70,000. More here: [http://bloom.bg/1NoC4jv](http://bloom.bg/1NoC4jv)

**Phys.org:** “**First comprehensive report examines Americans recruited by ISIS**”, December 2, 2015

A new study offers the first comprehensive review of Americans who have been recruited by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) based on legal records and
social media research conducted by the George Washington University's Program on Extremism. The report, "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," examined social media accounts and legal documents of nearly 400 Americans who sympathize with ISIS.
"The phenomenon of Americans joining jihadist groups is not new, but the size of the ISIS-related radicalization and mobilization is unprecedented," said Lorenzo Vidino, director of the GW's Program on Extremism.

The study provides insights into the sympathizers in the legal system:

Their average age is 26.

More than 50 percent traveled or attempted to travel abroad.

Authorities have made arrests in 21 states.

40 percent converted to Islam.

14 percent are female.

The report examined more than 7,000 pages of legal documents related to the 71 individuals charged with ISIS-related activities in the U.S. It found that the profiles of individuals involved in ISIS-related activities in the U.S. differ widely in race, age, social class, education and family background. Their motivations are equally diverse. The report says there have been active investigations in all 50 states, and U.S. law enforcement officials have made arrests in 21 states. It notes the highest number of ISIS recruits were charged in New York and Minnesota.

"Other than size, diversity is the other main characteristic of this phenomenon. We have seen cases in big cities and rural towns. The individuals involved range from hardened militants to teenage girls, petty criminals and college students," Dr. Vidino said. "While some seek to join the self-declared caliphate in ISIS-controlled territory, others plan attacks within the U.S. It's a growing and disturbing phenomenon."

The Program on Extremism monitored nearly 300 Twitter accounts of U.S.-based ISIS sympathizers during the six-month study. This activity showed how social media plays a crucial role in the radicalization and, at times, mobilization of U.S.-based ISIS sympathizers.

"ISIS and its supporters are adept at using social media to radicalize and recruit Americans," said Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the GW's Program on Extremism. "A small number of Americans have whole-heartedly embraced their new-found ISIS support system online. The bar for Americans to join these..."
terrorist organizations has been lowered, allowing a level of connectivity and interaction with recruiters and propagandists unheard of just a few years ago."

The Program on Extremism will publish some of the legal documents used to compile the report on its website. This will be one of the largest online collections of ISIS-related legal documents on American cases.

The paper concludes with policy recommendations, including increased resources devoted to countering violent extremism, a framework for targeted interventions with radicalized individuals and legal guidance for people interested in sharing messages countering ISIS propaganda.

The report was made public at an event on Tuesday. Those attending the launch included Michael Downing, commanding officer of the Counter-Terrorism and Special Operations Bureau at the Los Angeles Police Department, and Ambassador Alberto Fernandez, former coordinator of the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications at the U.S. Department of State, who offered their commentary on the report and its value to the law enforcement community.


By Phil Elmore

What would you do if you woke up one day and realized that your small business – or your very large business – had branded a product with a name like “ISIS”? As you know, the Islamic State pretty much has the lock on that particular name now, despite the existence of everything from an Isis-themed television show from the ’70s (Isis was a goddess superhero on the show) to persistent attempts to rebrand the acronym (such as Obama’s favorite, ISIL, and the much-less catchy “Daesh,” whatever “Daesh” is supposed to be). For one app, the ill-fated “Isis Wallet,” the branding misstep arguably caused its failure.

As previously described here in WND, “Isis Wallet, which [had] the backing of AT&T, T-Mobile and Verizon, [was] an attempt to compete with mobile payments firms like PayPal and Google Wallet. The idea is that your smartphone,
which you carry everywhere with you anyway, could be used to pay for goods and services at point-of-sale locations equipped with ‘near field communication,’ or NFC. … Already struggling to catch on compared to competing mobile payments systems, Isis Wallet was dealt a devastating blow by the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The groans of Isis Wallet’s management could be heard for miles: Their carefully selected brand strategy [instead evoked] thoughts of this vicious Islamist militant group.” Even renaming Isis Wallet to “Softcard” could not save the app. It shut down at the end of March, its customers encouraged to download and use Google Wallet instead.

Random though these brand conflicts might seem, they are becoming increasingly possible thanks to the efforts of groups like ISIS where social media is concerned. The terrorists are increasingly tech-savvy. They know the value of using social media both to recruit and to propagandize. A recent study by George Washington University’s Program on Extremism declares microblogging site Twitter the social media app of choice where terrorists are concerned. There are perhaps hundreds of ISIS sympathizers on Twitter (one NBC headline called them, laughably, “ambassadors”), spreading the group’s hate and trawling for new recruits.

“The report identified American ISIS supporters who acted as online ‘spotters’ for the terror gang,” write Josh Meyer and Tracy Connor, “and the researchers who monitored those accounts for six months were able to watch recruitment of recently converted Americans unfold in real time. … The report also looked at how U.S. jihadists meet and recruit in person, uncovering small groups of apparent ISIS sympathizers in a number of cities.” The terrorist propagandists communicated primarily in English and were able to discuss a wide range of topics.

Extremist groups like ISIS have, in fact, expanded into multiple media formats, bringing their message to the masses in ever-more sophisticated ways. One such media outlet is al-Qaida’s online magazine, Inspire. The terror group uses Inspire to call for violence, propagate its vile theology and generally promote its goals. Just as Isis Wallet took great pains to distance itself from the name “Isis,” another business in the social media application business seeks to eliminate any link between their own brand and al-Qaida’s propaganda mouthpiece. Rasheen Carbin, co-founder and CMO of nspHire, fears his app is too close to “Inspire”
for comfort. He says he wasn’t even aware that al-Qaida had a magazine until earlier this week, when one of his partners informed him of it.

“His wife heard a story on Minnesota Public Radio,” Carbin says, “that mentioned it. Naturally I thought of our app, nspHire. Inspire is a 5-year-old, English-language web magazine published by al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula aimed at recruiting Brits and Americans.”

Carbin’s application is something that, in and of itself, is newsworthy. It directly connects job seekers and employers for real-time conversations through in-app messaging. It’s actually modeled after the popular dating app Tinder.

“We decided to create the app because of our frustration with job boards,” Carbin explains. “We previously ran one and used others extensively. We found that we were often getting either unqualified candidates or way more candidates than we could reasonably expect to consider. Our aim was to create a simple, fast way to view lots of candidates.”

The problem, Carbin explained, is that his “Tinder for Jobs” could become too closely associated with al-Qaida’s “Inspire” if both gain more exposure. That puts him, and his company, in the difficult position of investing time and money in a brand that could ultimately fail because of the unflattering connection in the brand name.

“We are trying to head this problem off at the pass,” he admits. “As we get more and more coverage for being a good recruiting tool, it’s important that people not confuse us with al-Qaida’s recruiting efforts. We’d recently been considering a name change, but when my partner told me about the al-Qaida magazine, it only increased our desire to go in a different direction.”

Carbin says his company’s management has not yet decided on a new name, but they’re hopeful they can incorporate current app-user feedback in the rebranding efforts. “We’re trying to be as thoughtful as we can about the process of selecting a new name,” he says. “We are troubled by the potential for terrorism in the real and virtual worlds, especially in light of the recent attacks in Paris. While we don’t generally take it into consideration during our day-to-day management of the business, we believe that free ideas and free markets are the best cures for the poverty and despotism that allow terrorism to flourish.”

This call to free ideas and free markets is one that will likely resonate with Carbin’s customers, even if they don’t see the connection to al-Qaida’s
propaganda efforts. “Consumers probably won’t understand what we’re trying to accomplish,” he adds. “That’s OK. That doesn’t absolve us of our obligation to do the right thing. What’s good for America is good for us.”


At least 300 American Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) sympathizers are spreading propaganda for the terrorist group and actively recruiting individuals on Twitter, according to a report from the Program on Extremism at George Washington University.

The report, which drew on extensive interviews, court records and media reports, found that American ISIS supporters "spasmodically create accounts that often get suspended in a never-ending cat-and-mouse game." A new Twitter account or multiple accounts with a variation of the previous username spring up within hours, like the heads of a hydra.

Researchers also discovered that while American ISIS supporters tend to be male, nearly a third of the social media accounts examined appear to be operated by women.

The majority of American ISIS supporters on Twitter use avatars of black flags, lions and green birds, a symbol that celebrates the virtues of martyrdom, the report found. Most of them post in English.

Identifying the accounts was challenging because most were anonymous, the researchers said, so they relied on a number of clues: some users self-identified as American; some were spotted through Twitter’s geo-locating tools; and some used the Arabic "al-Amriki," or "the American," in their Twitter handles. The researchers also analyzed their use of language, spelling and cultural references.

Twitter accounts were broken down into three categories of users: nodes, amplifiers, and shout-outs.

The nodes are identified as the top voices in the ISIS Twittersphere and are the ones who primarily create content for the network.

Amplifiers retweet and "favorite" material from popular users. (The report noted that because of the lack of original content from amplifiers, it is unclear whether or not they are real people or Twitter handles programmed to post automatically.)
Shout-outs introduce new accounts to the community and promote the new accounts of previously suspended users.

American supporters also act as "spotters" for future recruits.

The report stated:

In one case the seemingly naïve individual posted general questions about religion, to which ISIS supporters quickly responded in a calm and authoritative manner. After a few weeks, the accounts of hardened ISIS supporters slowly introduced increasingly ardent views into the conversation. The new recruit was then invited to continue the conversion privately, often via Twitter's Direct Message feature or on other private messaging platforms such as surespot.

The researchers also point out that "ISIS-related radicalization is by no means limited to social media." While some supporters express their interest solely online, in a number of cases U.S. extremists "cultivated and later strengthened their interest in ISIS’s narrative through face-to-face relationships. In most cases online and offline dynamics complement one another," the authors write.

The report highlights how the Internet has overhauled radicalization and made it more accessible to the masses.

"Some of the most important intelligence is no longer secret," Jane Harman, a former member of Congress and the president of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, wrote in the forward to the report. "Some of the best information is open-source, plastered on message boards or a 19-year-old's Twitter feed. Policymakers have been slow to adapt; spies would still rather squint at satellite photos than scrape Facebook feeds."

Christian Today: “ISIS has 300 supporters in U.S. — a third of them women — who itnerawct mostly via Twitter, study shows”, December 3, 2015

By Hazel Torres

The Islamic State (ISIS) has at least 300 supporters in the United States—one-third of them women—and the number is rising as these supporters spread
propaganda and hunt for other recruits, a new study from the George Washington University disclosed.

Researchers at the university's Program on Extremism said Twitter is the platform of choice of ISIS' U.S.-based sympathisers, NBC News reported.

What is remarkable is that even as Twitter management regularly suspends accounts that contain ISIS material, the accounts are immediately replaced with new ones to continue the spread of propaganda.

The George Washington University report said ISIS supporters even consider the taking down of their Twitter accounts as a "badge of honor."

The university researchers were able to monitor the recruitment of ISIS supporters in the U.S. for six months.

"In one case the seemingly naïve individual posted general questions about religion, to which ISIS supporters quickly responded in a calm and authoritative manner," the authors wrote.

"After a few weeks, the accounts of hardened ISIS supporters slowly introduced increasingly ardent views into the conversation. The new recruit was then invited to continue the conversion privately, often via Twitter's Direct Message feature or on other private messaging platforms such as surespot."

The report was also able to find out how U.S. jihadists meet and recruit in person, revealing clusters of ISIS supporters meeting in various cities.

"One of them, located in Texas, revolves around a few charismatic individuals and an Islamic studies group. Another, based in the suburbs of a large Midwestern city, appears to be composed of former high school friends and a handful of their acquaintances," the report said.

Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the university's Program on Extremism, noted that while American ISIS sympathisers are mostly male, nearly a third of the accounts they examined appeared to be used by women.

"They communicate primarily in English, and discuss a wide range of topics, from open support of terrorist attacks to boringly benign banter about everyday life," he said. "The online scene is a bit of a close-knit clique, where inside jokes are shared, memes are created, and dissenters are quickly ignored."
J.M. Berger, a social media counterterrorism analyst and co-author of a book about ISIS, said the report's analysis of offline clusters was highly revealing.

"For all that we talk about social media, there is still a significant role for face to face interaction," he said.

**Financials Trend:** “**ISIS Seeks Audience From Supporters In The US Through Twitter**”, December 3, 2015

By Mark Simms

**Twitter Inc (NYSE: TWTR)** was a notable decliner during Wednesday’s trading session declining by 0.5% on relatively high volumes, which were 0.5 times the daily average. The stock has been underperforming the broader markets over the last several months. Twitter has been forming lower tops and bottoms indicative of bears using every rally as a selling opportunity. The oscillators, which measure momentum, are clearly indicating that bears are in total control at the momentum. The stock trades below all daily moving averages. The index measuring relative strength has given a fresh sell signal, which is a bearish sign. Traders see the stock heading to levels of $24.50.

A report from the extremist program at George Washington University indicates that ISIS supporters are tapping into the power of social networks through Twitter to spread their influence.

The report claims that more than 300 American supporters of the radical terrorist group have been using the social platform to recruit new individuals as well as spreading their propaganda. According to the report, such a Twitter accounts are usually suspended once they are reported. However, the account owners usually seem to take pride and view a suspended account as an honorable thing.

Also, the process seems to be an endless circle because similar new accounts pop up as soon as the old ones are suspended. Furthermore, the supporters are continuously changing their tactics making it more difficult for authorities to terminate their presence on the online platform. The researchers claim that most
of the people who own those accounts hide behind anonymity. Twitter spotted some of them using its geo-tagging tools while the researchers used clues such as “Al-Amriki” which means “The American.” The also analyzed some cultural references, language, and the spelling.

Some of the cultural references include the use of a green birds, lions and black flags as a scriptural derivative from a hadith from Prophet Mohammad. One particular clever case was the use of the Detroit Lions Symbol to represent ISIS support.

According to an analysis provided by the extremist program, 14% of the followers are females whose average age is 26. It further suggested that two out of every five followers have converted to Islam and most of them have traveled abroad or attempted to do so.

The report also categorized ISIS support accounts on Twitter in three categories: Shout-outs, Nodes, and Amplifiers. The Nodes are the top accounts for ISIS on Twitter whose main agenda is to come up with content. The Amplifiers retweet material to generate more audience, and the shout-outs are responsible for creating awareness about new accounts. One of Twitter Inc (NYSE:TWTR)’s spokespersons declined to comment on the matter but pointed to existing policies that discourage any threat of violence.

**KCTV:** "Study says ISIS using social media to recruit variety of Americans", December 3, 2015

By Eric Burke

KANSAS CITY, MO (KCTV) -

With the attacks in California, talk about terrorism is in the forefront once again. The talks narrow in on groups like ISIS and if they’re actively recruiting in the U.S. as well as who they are targeting. A local professor says yes, ISIS wants Americans.

“It's not just an idea of the Middle Eastern man engaged in terrorism, it's also American-born kids,” said University of Missouri-Kansas City professor Dr. Rebecca Best.
Best teaches a class on terrorism. When it comes to terrorist organizations like ISIS, she said they don’t want failures, they don’t want to become a laughing stock, so they’re recruitment is targeted.

“Ideally have people who are sufficiently intelligent, sufficiently able to sort of blend in, that then can effectively carry out these attacks,” she said.

One of the ways ISIS recruits, especially in America, is online. Lorenzo Vidino is the director of George Washington University’s Center for Cyber and Homeland Security.

“ISIS is very good at recruiting on social media and the demographic on Twitter and Instagram is the young kids, it's the teenagers and people in their early 20s,” he said.

Vidino’s comments are backed up by a report released by George Washington University. In a six month study on ISIS in America, researchers combed through thousands of legal documents and focused on American ISIS supporters already in the legal system.

“They’re old, they’re young, they’re rich, they’re poor, they’re black, they’re white, they’re high school and they're college educated,” said university researcher Seamus Hughes.

If that scares you, Best said ISIS is doing its job. They want to create a sense of fear and have you thinking “We could be next.”

“That means recruiting people you wouldn’t expect, people who don’t seem like a typical terrorist,” she said.

The recruitment isn’t isolated to only certain parts of the country either. According to the report, the FBI has 900 open cases spanning all 50 states.

**Syracuse:** “ISIS are Detroit Lions fans? Islamic State propaganda reportedly uses NFL team”, December 3, 2015

By Geoff Herbert

Are members of the Islamic State secretly fans of the Detroit Lions?

A new study from The George Washington University analyzed social media activity by ISIS supporters in America, and found patterns among 300 Twitter
accounts. Coded techniques, including certain pictures at their online avatars, demonstrate their participation or sympathy in the group’s mission.

According to the Daily Caller, many accounts use black flags, green birds and lions as their profile photo. The green bird represents Muslims who die as martyr and reach "jannah," or heaven, while the lion is an Islamic symbol for bravery.

Twitter says it does not allow users to make threats or promote violence or terrorism, but The Guardian reports U.S.-based ISIS supporters who get their accounts suspended see it as a "badge of honor." Others avoid detection by hiding their messages under the guise of a football team’s logo that happens to use a picture of a lion.

"A particularly clever account uses a picture of the Detroit Lions, combining a distinctly American pride in an NFL team and the popular Islamic symbol of bravery very frequently used by ISIS supporters," researchers said. "Images, quotes and links to lectures of the deceased radical cleric Anwar al-Awlaki are favorites of the American ISIS scene. Increasingly, photos of other Americans who have been arrested on terrorism charges, killed waging jihad abroad or were responsible for homegrown terrorist attacks are used as avatars."

ISIS, also known as ISIL or Daesh, reportedly has several thousand Americans posting or sharing propaganda online, using sites like Facebook, Google + and Tumblr, but Twitter is believed to be the most popular outlet. Researchers some have tweeted #BlackLivesMatter in an effort to recruit black Muslims to "spread their propaganda to unsuspecting Americans of all backgrounds."

"It is an Internet community with different roles and personalities, just like you have a community of Justin Bieber fans," study co-author Lorenzo Vidino told the Guardian. "They're getting better and better at it and there's much more coordination than we thought."

The Detroit Lions, who play their next game Thursday night against the Green Bay Packers, have not commented on the report.


By William Gallo
WASHINGTON—

Their average age is 26. Eighty-six percent are male. Most use Twitter and other social media to find and spread propaganda. But other than that, there are frustratingly few traits in common among individuals in the United States who support the Islamic State group, according to a new study.

The report, titled "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," is an attempt by the George Washington University's Program on Extremism to provide a snapshot of the "small but active" group of Americans and other U.S.-based individuals who are infatuated with the Sunni Muslim extremist group.

But after spending six months going over court records, social media posts, and U.S. officials' statements, the authors struggled to identify a typical profile for an American IS supporter. Instead, they found the group to be "incredibly heterogeneous" and motivated by a wide range of factors.

"The profiles of individuals involved in ISIS-related activities in the U.S. differ widely in race, age, social class, education, and family background," said the report, authored by Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes. "Their motivations are equally diverse and defy easy analysis."

Demographic makeup

Since March 2014, 71 individuals in the U.S. have been charged with IS-related activities in 21 states.

In total, there are 900 active investigations into IS sympathizers – some in every state, the report found. Some of those arrested were as young as 15, others were nearly 50.

And although the overwhelming majority were male, the authors found that more and more women are becoming attracted to the group. Females, for instance, make up nearly one-third of the 300 U.S.-linked social media accounts actively spreading IS propaganda, the report said.

The report also presented a complex mixture of ideological and personal motivations.
Many, as could be expected, were religious radicals, some having formally studied Islam. Forty percent were Muslim converts. Others appeared to have little to no experience with the faith, instead appearing to be thrill seekers drawn to the savage violence committed by IS.

Motivations

Some recruits appear to be drawn to the group in part because of political causes, cultural differences, or feelings of disenfranchisement with American culture. In other cases, individuals began to support IS following traumatic, life-changing events, the report added.

U.S.-based IS supporters also represent a wide range of threats, ranging from those who are merely "inspired" by the group to those who have taken concrete steps to support it.

As of fall 2015, 250 Americans have either traveled or tried to travel to Syria or Iraq to join Islamic State, the report said, quoting official U.S. estimates.

Many have also been directly involved in plots to carry out attacks on U.S. soil. A few, the report said, have even reached "mid-level leadership positions" in IS.

Most don't act

But the report concludes that most U.S.-based IS supporters "will never make the leap from talk to action, from being keyboard warriors to actual militancy."

"Some will mature out of what is just an awkward adolescent phase. Others simply lack the personality traits necessary for committing terror attacks or setting out for ISIS territory. On a more mundane level, others find themselves restrained by the practical commitments of their daily lives," it said.

'Blunt ISIS’s allure’

Islamic State’s radicalization process has been greatly aided by social media, allowing it both to recruit new supporters and potentially call on them to either travel to the Middle East or carry out attacks at home, the report said.

While stressing there is no "silver bullet," the authors recommended a comprehensive approach to "blunt ISIS' allure," including stronger intelligence gathering, renewed law enforcement tactics, and putting a greater emphasis on countering the group’s message.
"Unfortunately, the resources devoted to countering violent extremism (CVE) by the U.S. government remain woefully inadequate for the task at hand," it warned. "Robust funding and dynamic programs are needed immediately."


SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. --

The FBI said Friday that it is officially investigating the mass shooting in California as an act of terrorism, while a U.S. law enforcement official revealed that the woman who helped her husband carry out the attack had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group and its leader on Facebook under an alias.

David Bowdich, assistant director of the FBI's Los Angeles office, would not give further details about why the bureau made the determination, saying at a news conference that "there's a number of pieces of evidence that has pushed us off the cliff."

Syed Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, killed 14 people at the holiday party for his co-workers. The Muslim couple died hours later in a fierce gunbattle with police.

A Facebook official says Tashfeen Malik praised the leader of the Islamic State group in a post at 11 a.m. Wednesday, when the couple were believed to have stormed a San Bernardino social service center and opened fire.

The Facebook official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the person was not allowed under corporate policy to be quoted by name, said the company discovered the account Thursday. It removed the profile from public view and reported its contents to law enforcement.

Malik, 27, was a Pakistani who grew up in Saudi Arabia and came to the U.S. in 2014 on a fiance visa. Farook, a 28-year-old restaurant health inspector for the
county, was born in Chicago to Pakistani parents and raised in Southern California.

Another U.S. official said Malik expressed "admiration" for the extremist group's leader on Facebook under the alias account. But the official said there was no sign that anyone affiliated with the Islamic State communicated back with her, and there was no evidence of any operational instructions being conveyed to her.

The two officials were not authorized to discuss the case publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The FBI has been investigating the shooting at a social service center as a potential act of terrorism but had reached no firm conclusions as of Thursday, with authorities cautioning repeatedly that the violence could have stemmed from a workplace grudge or a combination of motives.

Separately, a U.S. intelligence official said on Thursday that Farook had been in contact with known Islamic extremists on social media.

Law enforcement officials have long warned that Americans acting in sympathy with Islamic extremists - though not on direct orders - could launch an attack inside the U.S. Using slick propaganda, the Islamic State in particular has urged sympathizers worldwide to commit violence in their countries.

Others have done so. In May, just before he attacked a gathering in Texas of people drawing cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, a Phoenix man tweeted his hope that Allah would view him as a holy warrior.

Two weeks ago, with Americans on edge over the Islamic State attacks in Paris that left 130 people dead, FBI Director James Comey said that U.S. authorities had no specific or credible intelligence pointing to an attack on American soil.

Seventy-one people have been charged in the U.S. since March 2014 in connection with supporting ISIS, including 56 this year, according to a recent report from the George Washington University Program on Extremism. Though most are men, "women are taking an increasingly prominent role in the jihadist
world," the report said.

It was not immediately clear whether Malik exhibited any support for radical Islamists before she arrived in the U.S. - or, like scores of others arrested by the FBI, became radicalized through online or in-person associations after arriving.

To receive her visa, Malik was subjected to a vetting process the U.S. government describes as vigorous. It includes in-person interviews, fingerprints, checks against terrorist watch lists and reviews of her family members, travel history and places where she lived and worked.

Foreigners applying from countries that are home to Islamic extremists - such as Pakistan - undergo additional scrutiny before the State Department and Homeland Security approve their applications.

Pakistani intelligence officials said Malik moved as a child with her family to Saudi Arabia 25 years ago.

The two officials, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, said that the family is originally from a town in Punjab province and that the father initially moved to Saudi Arabia around three decades ago for work.

Farook had no criminal record and was not under scrutiny by local or federal law enforcement before the attack, authorities said. Friends knew him by his quick smile, his devotion to Islam and his talk about restoring cars.

They didn't know he was busy with his wife building pipe bombs and stockpiling thousands of rounds of ammunition for the commando-style assault Wednesday on a gathering of Farook's colleagues from San Bernardino County's health department.

"This was a person who was successful, who had a good job, a good income, a wife and a family. What was he missing in his life?" asked Nizaam Ali, who worshipped with Farook at a mosque in San Bernardino.
Authorities said that the couple sprayed as many as 75 rounds into the room before fleeing and had more than 1,600 rounds left when they were killed. At home, they had 12 pipe bombs, tools to make more explosives and well over 4,500 rounds, police said.

Police Lt. Mike Madden, one of the first officers to reach the room, said the carnage was unspeakable, the scene overwhelming: the smell of gunpowder, the wails of the wounded the blood, fire sprinklers going off and fire alarms blaring. All in a room with a Christmas tree and decorations on every table.

The dead ranged in age from 26 to 60. Among the 21 injured were two police officers hurt during the manhunt, authorities said. Two of the wounded remained in critical condition Thursday. Nearly all the dead and wounded were county employees.

They were remembered Thursday night as several thousand mourners gathered at a ballpark for a candlelight and prayer vigil with leaders of several religions.

The soft-spoken Farook was known to pray every day at San Bernardino’s Dar Al Uloom Al Islamiyah mosque. That is where Nizaam Ali and his brother Rahemaan Ali met Farook.

The last time Rahemaan Ali saw his friend was three weeks ago, when Farook abruptly stopped coming to pray. Rahemaan Ali said Farook seemed happy and his usual self. Both brothers said they never saw anything to make them think Farook was violent.

They said Farook reported meeting his future wife online.

Meanwhile, divorce records depicted a home divided by abuse. Farook’s mother alleged in 2006 that her husband, also named Syed, attacked her while her children were present, dropped a TV on her and pushed her toward a car, according to records.

Rafia Sultana Farook filed a petition for a domestic violence order of protection on July 3, 2006, against her husband. She said she was forced to move out with three of her children because her husband continually harassed her "verbally
and physically," according to the divorce records.

The Associated Press could not immediately reach the father for comment and was unable to corroborate the allegations in the records. No one answered the door at a home in Corona where a neighbor said the father lived.


By Amanda Lee Myers and Tami Abdollah

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. (AP) — The FBI announced Friday that it is investigating the mass shooting at a Southern California office party as an act of terrorism, but the agency's director said there is no indication the husband and wife who killed 14 people were part of a larger plot or members of a terror cell.

If the investigation confirms the massacre was inspired by Islamic extremism, it would be the deadliest such terrorist attack on U.S. soil since Sept. 11, 2001.

While authorities did not cite specific evidence that led them to the terrorism focus, a U.S. law enforcement official said the wife, Tashfeen Malik, had under a Facebook alias pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group and its leader. A Facebook official said Malik praised Islamic State in a post at 11 a.m. Wednesday, around the time the couple stormed a San Bernardino social service center and opened fire.

Malik and her husband, Syed Farook, died in a fierce gunbattle with authorities several hours after their commando-style assault on a gathering of Farook’s colleagues from San Bernardino County's health department.

An Islamic State-affiliated news service called Malik and Farook "supporters" of their Islamist cause but stopped short of claiming responsibility for the attack.

FBI Director James Comey would not discuss whether anyone affiliated with Islamic State communicated back to Malik, but he said there was no indication yet that the plot was directed by any other foreign terror group. He also declined to rule out that future possibility.
"The investigation so far has developed indications of radicalization by the killers and of potential inspiration by foreign terrorist organizations," Comey said. He cautioned that the investigation has not yet shown evidence the couple was part of a larger group.

Despite mounting signs of the couple's radicalization, there "is a lot of evidence that doesn't quite make sense," Comey said in a nod to the fact the investigation was just two days old.

Attorneys representing Farook’s family urged the public and media to wait for specific evidence before jumping to conclusions. They said none of his relatives had any indication either Farook or his wife held extremist views.

David Bowdich, head of the FBI's Los Angeles office, said "a number of pieces of evidence" point to terrorism and that the agency was focused on that idea "for good reason." He would not elaborate.

The U.S. official who revealed the Facebook post was not authorized to discuss the case publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. The Facebook official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity because the person was not allowed under corporate policy to be quoted by name, said the company discovered Wednesday's post on Thursday, removed the profile from public view and reported its contents to law enforcement.

Bowdich said he was not aware of the Islamic State-affiliated Aamaq news service report but was not surprised the Islamic State would attempt to link itself to the attack. He said investigators were looking carefully to determine if there is an Islamic State connection.

Farook, a U.S. citizen who grew up in Southern California, and Malik rented a townhome in nearby Redlands where investigators said they found an arsenal of ammunition and homemade bombs. On Friday morning, the property's owner allowed reporters inside. The surreal scene — reporters walking among baby items, handling family photos and looking at dirty dishes in a sink — was broadcast live on cable TV.

While appearing unseemly, there was nothing compromising from an investigative standpoint as Bowdich said the FBI was done with the scene.

Meantime, analysts were trying to retrieve data from two cellphones found nearby that had been crushed in an apparent attempt to destroy the information inside. "We hope that will take us to their motivation," he said.
Until Friday, federal and local law enforcement officials said terrorism was a possibility but that the violence could have stemmed from a workplace grudge.

Attorneys for Farook's family urged the public not to rush to judgment.

"If the most evidence there is to any affiliation is a Facebook account under another person's name ... then that's hardly anything at all," attorney David Chesley said.

Chesley and his legal partner, Mohammad Abuershaid, described Malik as "just a housewife" who closely followed Muslim traditions. They said Farook's mother, who lived with the couple, never saw any of the weapons or bombs authorities found. The FBI questioned her Wednesday night and, according to the attorneys, refused to release her until Farook's siblings came for questioning.

The couple's orphaned 6-month-old daughter is in the care of child protective services, and the family will try to obtain custody her next week.

Farook had no criminal record, and neither he nor his wife was under scrutiny by local or federal law enforcement before the attack, authorities said.

Malik, 27, was a Pakistani who grew up in Saudi Arabia and came to the U.S. in 2014 on a fiancé visa. Farook, a 28-year-old restaurant health inspector for the county, was born in Chicago to Pakistani parents but raised in Southern California.

Law enforcement officials have long warned that Americans acting in sympathy with Islamic extremists — though not on direct orders — could launch an attack inside the U.S. Using slick propaganda, the Islamic State in particular has urged sympathizers worldwide to commit violence in their countries.

Others have done so. In May, just before he attacked a gathering in Texas of people drawing cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, a Phoenix man tweeted his hope that Allah would view him as a holy warrior.

Two weeks ago, with Americans on edge over the Islamic State attacks in Paris that left 130 people dead, Comey said that U.S. authorities had no specific or credible intelligence pointing to an attack on American soil.

Since March 2014, 71 people have been charged in the U.S. in connection with supporting the Islamic State, including 56 this year, according to a recent report from the George Washington University Program on Extremism. Though most are men, "women are taking an increasingly prominent role in the jihadist world," the report said.
It was not immediately clear whether Malik exhibited any support for radical Islamists before she arrived in the U.S. — or, like scores of others arrested by the FBI, became radicalized through online or in-person associations after arriving.

Friends of the soft-spoken Farook who knew him from his daily prayers at a mosque in San Bernardino said they saw nothing to make them think he was violent. They said Farook reported meeting his future wife online.

To receive her visa, Malik was subjected to a vetting process the U.S. government describes as vigorous. It includes in-person interviews, fingerprints, checks against terrorist watch lists and reviews of her family members, travel history and places where she lived and worked.

Foreigners applying from countries that are home to Islamic extremists — such as Pakistan — undergo additional scrutiny before the State Department and Homeland Security approve their applications.

Pakistani officials said Malik moved with her family to Saudi Arabia as a young child. A person close to the Saudi government said Malik eventually returned to Pakistan. The person was not authorized to speak publicly, and did so on condition of anonymity.

Inside the couple’s townhome, reporters found a copy of the Quran on a living room table along with several documents, including one that authorities left behind listing what they had seized. Walls were covered with decorative rugs with Arabic script.

An upstairs bedroom had personal documents, a crib and boxes of diapers.

Abdollah reported from Washington. Contributing to this report were Associated Press writers Ken Dilanian and Eric Tucker in Washington; Zarar Khan in Islamabad, Pakistan; Brian Skoloff in Redlands, California; Kimberly Pierceall in San Bernardino, California; Lee Keath in Cairo, Egypt; Michael R. Blood, Gillian Flaccus, Christine Armario, Sue Manning and Justin Pritchard in Los Angeles.

Chicago Tribune: “Who wants to be a terrorist?”, December 4, 2015

Hasan Edmonds is a 2011 graduate of West Aurora High School, where he ran track and was known as a "normal kid." He joined the Illinois National Guard,
serving as a supply specialist at the Joliet armory. So it came as a shock to family and friends when he was arrested last year at Midway Airport as he allegedly tried to travel to Egypt to join the Islamic State.

"This is a surprise," said Tiffany Edmonds, his aunt. "This is a nightmare. I still don't believe it." He and his cousin, who was arrested separately, reportedly are close to reaching a deal with prosecutors to plead guilty to plotting to attack the armory.

It's hard enough to understand why someone living in the Middle East would head for a war zone to join a violent terrorist group and help erect a repressive caliphate, at the risk of death or imprisonment. The far deeper mystery is why someone in the United States would decide to do so, or to help the Islamic State. Yet some do.

The latest and most shocking example is Tashfeen Malik, a Pakistani immigrant who pledged allegiance to the Islamic State on Facebook before taking part in a bloody rampage Wednesday in San Bernardino, Calif. At this point it appears she and her husband, Syed Farook, were inspired, but not directed, by the group.

Trying to understand such choices is important to combating the rise of Islamic State (also known as ISIS) and the threat it poses here at home. The San Bernardino massacre showed how hard it is to spot potential volunteers: Malik had passed a criminal and security background check to get a visa that allowed her to come to the United States to marry Farook, a U.S. citizen who had never shown up on the FBI’s radar. Farook, like Edmonds, is proof that the people who appear to be drawn to helping the Islamic State are not necessarily the ones you would suspect.

In fact, they vary considerably, according to a new study published by the Program on Extremism at The George Washington University. It examined 71 individuals charged with involvement with the jihadi organization. The group includes men and women. The youngest was 15 at the time of arrest; the oldest, 47.

"The individuals range from hardened militants to teenage girls, petty criminals and college students," Lorenzo Vidino, director of the program, told The New York Times. "The diversity is staggering."

But the suspects tend to have a few things in common: The great majority are male, younger than 30 and American citizens. Nearly half are converts to Islam,
and half have at least tried to travel abroad. They also tend to be active on Twitter and Facebook. "Social media plays a crucial role in the radicalization and, at times, mobilization of U.S.-based ISIS sympathizers," the report says.

The motivations of these people are not easy to untangle. "Many were outraged by the appalling violence" employed by Syrian President Bashar Assad against insurgents, but political impulses "are deeply intertwined with, and impossible to separate from, personal motives." A friend of one woman who went to Syria said she "was always looking for something to define herself, an identity to cling to."

In that respect, this extremist movement is no different from other ones, offering the lost or disaffected a sacred mission, a greater purpose or a utopian dream. Such appeals have always found susceptible souls ready to consider dying or killing for a cause that strikes them as noble, even if it appears crazy or evil to most people.

How to combat the danger? One way is the way many of these suspects were detected — by tireless law enforcement monitoring of communications and sting operations. Another is by encouraging people to be alert for signs of alienation, anger and radicalization in those around them.

"There are warning signs," one expert has said. "In the same way that if you think someone is engaged in gang activity or illegal substances or whatever, you don't just kind of sit back and say, 'Oh, that's interesting.' You take action."

When it comes to preventing terrorism, there is no substitute for the vigilance of ordinary Americans willing to confront small dangers before they can become big ones.


By Cody M. Poplin

Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University released an excellent report earlier this week entitled *ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa*. The report, consisting of two parts, first examines all cases of U.S. persons arrested, indicted, or convicted in the United States for ISIS-related activities. The second part examines the individual's...
various motivations, path to radicalization, and the degree of their tangible links to ISIS.

Hughes previously wrote a Lawfare Foreign Policy Essay arguing against the current approach of "material support of bust," suggesting that "without a viable alternative to filing material support charges, the United States is stuck in an endless cycle in which each side throws up their hands and the next 200 families are left talking to their loved ones through a prison cell or learning about their deaths in the latest issue of Dabiq."

Defense One summarizes the report, noting:

The group is so diverse, ranging from a 15-year-old boy to a 47-year-old Air Force Veteran, that it makes it hard for authorities to find a solution to preventing their radicalization. They come from different states, socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, “defying any cookie-cutter profile of the American ISIS supporter,” the researchers say. They include college students, teenage girls, and a former fundamentalist Christian, from all over the United States.

According to Vidino and Hughes, fifty-six individuals have been charged with ISIS-related activities in 2015, a record number of terrorism-related arrests for any year since 9/11. Of those charges, the average age is 26, 86 percent are male, 51 percent traveled or attempted to travel aboard, 27 percent were involved in plots to carry out attacks on U.S. soil, and just over half (55 percent), were arrested as part of an operation involving an informant and/or undercover agent.

The report also presents the following four infographics

· ISIS Recruits in the U.S. Legal System
· The American ISIS Twitter Scene
· The ISIS Den in America: Real World-Clusters
· Inside the ISIS U.S. Echo Chamber

Documenting the profiles of 71 individuals charged with various ISIS-related activities, the report includes the following database of more than 7,000 pages of legal documents detailing ISIS-related legal proceedings. The dataset includes criminal complaints, indictments, affidavits, and courtroom transcripts.

By Michael Matza

She called herself "Young Lioness" and roared online for the Islamic State.

Federal prosecutors say Keonna Thomas, 30, of North Philadelphia, tweeted ISIS propaganda, raised funds for jihadists in Syria, booked a flight, mapped a route, and planned to go there for a suicide attack after a fighter she met online recruited her.

Arrested eight months ago, she is scheduled for trial in June.

She is among 71 people cited this week in "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," a report by George Washington University's Program on Extremism. Raqqa, a city in Syria, is the capital of ISIS's presumptive caliphate.

The 50-page document draws on docketed cases of people charged in the United States with ISIS-related activities between March 2014 and November 2015.

Suggesting a sharp rise in such investigations, 56 of the 71 were arrested this year.

The release follows the recent terror attacks in Paris, a worldwide travel alert for U.S. citizens, and nonspecific warnings about possible attacks on American soil.

ISIS, also known as ISIL, "blends traditional media platforms . . . and social media campaigns that can go viral in a matter of seconds," FBI Director James Comey told a Senate panel in July. "No matter the format, the message of radicalization spreads faster than we imagined just a few years ago."

In addition to Thomas, an unnamed minor in Pennsylvania is cited in the report. Three cases, involving the brothers Nader and Alaa Saadeh and coconspirators, emanate from North Jersey.

"In a democracy like ours, the expression of radical ideas is protected by the Constitution," Jane Harman, president of the Woodrow Wilson Center, a congressionally chartered think tank, says in the report's foreword. "Violent action - inspired by those beliefs - is not."
In the case of Thomas, who is charged with attempting to aid a foreign terrorist organization, it appears the FBI’s March 27 raid on her North 10th Street rowhouse prevented her from using the ticket she booked to Europe to begin her planned travel to Syria two days later.

In June, the FBI said about 200 Americans had traveled or attempted to travel to Syria to participate in the conflict.

Although the FBI has ISIS-related investigations in all 50 states, arrests have occurred in just 21.

The largest number - 13 - are from New York, followed by 11 from Minnesota.

Emphasizing that the defendants defy "cookie-cutter" profiling, the report says they are generally "seekers" - of revenge, status, identity, or thrills - and share some characteristics:

Eighty-six percent are male.

The average age, for men and women, is 26.

Forty percent are converts to Islam, which exceeds the estimated 23 percent of the American Muslim population who are converts.

The vast majority - 73 percent - plotted attacks outside the United States.

Sixty-four of the 71 people charged are U.S. citizens or legal residents. Researchers were unable to determine the status of the remaining seven.

The report also notes that "other forms of extremism constitute an equal, if not larger, threat to American domestic security," citing a New American Foundation study this year, which found that since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, almost twice as many Americans have been killed by white supremacists and other antigovernment domestic radicals as have been killed by Islamist extremists.

The report mentions Abu Khalid al Amriki, a U.S.-born jihadi who reportedly was killed in Syria in September. An avid user of five Twitter accounts, he appeared in an April ISIS-produced video wearing camouflage and holding an AK-47.

Citing court records, but without giving details, the report says Amriki "did at some point communicate with Keonna Thomas."

At Thomas' probable-cause hearing in April, the government said that in a message sent from her Internet address, the unemployed mother of two told a
man who she believed was an ISIS fighter that she dreamed of taking part in a martyrdom operation. His reply: "I can make that wish come true."

The government also presented evidence that Thomas applied for her first passport, bought a ticket on an international flight, got a visa for Turkey (a common transit point to Syria), and researched bus routes across Europe to the Middle East.

The public defenders who represented Thomas argued that the evidence in the government's case is ambiguous.

Thomas was remanded to the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service pending trial.

Stemming the threat of ISIS recruitment involves the difficult task of distinguishing Internet chatter from imminent action, especially since some potential recruits never make the leap from talk to terrorism.

The problem "cannot be solved by arrests alone," concludes the report, which calls for "dynamic programs" of counter-messaging aimed at the audiences targeted by ISIS to prevent radicalization.


By Andy Sullivan, Julia Edwards, and Juilia Harte

They were a married couple with a young child and a steady income. Those who knew them said they didn’t talk about the Islamic State, even as they were amassing an arsenal of pipe bombs and assault weapons. They kept a low profile on social media.

The husband and wife accused of killing 14 people in California bore little resemblance, apart from their Muslim faith, to the aimless young men who have been arrested in the United States for plotting violent attacks in the name of the Islamic State.

At the time that Syed Rizwan Farook, 28, and Tashfeen Malik, 27, were shooting people at an office holiday party in San Bernardino, California, the FBI
was investigating more than 900 U.S. residents for suspected ties to Islamic extremist groups.

Malik and Farook do not appear to have been on the list, raising major questions about the effectiveness of a massive law-enforcement effort meant to head off such attacks, including whether there need to be changes in the current strategy.

The FBI is investigating the incident on Wednesday as an act of terrorism. If the two are found to be Islamic militants, it would be the most serious such attack since the Sept. 11, 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center and attack on the Pentagon.

It comes less than a week after President Barack Obama and other administration officials said they were unaware of any significant Islamic State-inspired threats to the United States.

FBI officials said it was too soon to reassess their counter-terrorism strategy, with investigators still trying to piece together what motivated Farook and Malik, and whether authorities could have done anything to stop them.

"We're too busy to do that right now, but we will eventually look back to see is there learning here for us," FBI Director James Comey told reporters on Friday.

POWERS AND RESOURCES

The labeling of the San Bernardino attack as a terrorist act was expected to fuel debate in Washington about whether the FBI, National Security Agency and other intelligence agencies have adequate powers and resources to track and hunt down violent extremists who don't have clearcut profiles. Complaints about the intrusiveness of the NSA led just a week ago to the shutting down of its daily vacuuming of millions of Americans’ phone records. This step, a victory for privacy advocates, was opposed by some in Congress who called the surveillance a key element of national security.

There may also be questions about whether U.S. vetting of those applying for visas is tight enough to prevent someone like Malik from getting into the country. She entered the United States on a fiancée visa in 2014. Lawmakers and Obama have both said they will address the visa issue.

But U.S. officials say there is simply too much material and too many suspects to monitor to be able to foil every single attack. Given their number, it is difficult
even to keep close track of the suspects clearly connected to the Islamic State, let alone those who have not been vocal about their sympathies, either online or in the real world.

The best bet, Comey said, is for citizens to report suspicious activity. “What we hope you would do is not let fear become disabling, but instead try to channel it into an awareness of your surroundings,” he said. “If you see something that doesn’t make sense, you say something to somebody.”

FBI officials say the Islamic State poses a different sort of threat than al Qaeda and other extremist groups because it inspires sympathizers to act on their own, leaving little time between the "flash" of radicalization and the "bang" of an attack.

Over the past two years, the FBI has arrested at least 71 people for suspected ties to the extremist group, which is also known as ISIS or ISIL.

According to a Reuters review of court documents, those who have been charged have tended to be young men. They have often expressed their support for Islamic State on Facebook, Twitter and other types of social media, allowing FBI agents to identify and track them.

Typically, the agency assigns undercover agents or informants to draw out the suspects, gathering further evidence on their plans and sometimes supplying them with bomb-making material and other equipment for an attack that is then stopped before there is a risk to the public. This process can take months.

PERSONAL PROBLEMS

Comey said Islamic State frequently strikes a chord with young people with personal problems. "We’ve seen cases over the last nine months, people with drug problems, people with family problems, people with mental health problems. People who are struggling and trying to find a center in their life," he said.

Comey said the number of open cases has declined over the last six months.

Some 46 of the 71 arrested so far aspired to wage jihad overseas, not in the United States. More than half of those arrested were trying to travel to Syria to join the Islamic State caliphate or had already made the trip, according to the Reuters review.
Farook and Malik at this point don't appear to have been on any sort of terrorism watch list, government officials said.

With a six-month-old child, a steady job as a health inspector and a large extended family, Farook showed little outward signs of the social isolation and violent talk that the National Counterterrorism Center said can make individuals susceptible to extremist ideology.

An attorney for Farook's family said he was an isolated individual who had few friends, but the family had no idea that he was planning an attack.

Unlike many members of the Millennial generation, Farook and Malik left few digital footprints on the social-media outlets that have prompted many other FBI investigations.

FBI officials said Malik pledged allegiance to Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in an online post online shortly before she and Farook stormed the party at a social services center. Facebook said it had taken down a page set up by Malik under an alias and is cooperating with investigators.

Lorenzo Vidino, an expert with George Washington University's Project on Extremism, said his group found no trace of the couple in its archive of Islamic militant activity online.

While members of Al Qaeda tend to be driven by political ideology, those attracted to Islamic State have tended to be motivated by personal setbacks such as losing a job or getting in a fight, said Karen Greenberg, director of the Fordham University's Center on National Security. "If you read what they're saying, a lot of it is about themselves, not about a political agenda," she said.


By Mary Alice Salinas

WHITE HOUSE—
The female suspect in Wednesday's mass shooting in San Bernardino, California, came to the U.S. on a K-1 visa, known as the fiance visa.

George Washington University's Program on Extremism  162
2000 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 2210 – Washington, DC 20052
@GWUPoE - https://cchs.gwu.edu/program-extremism
Tashfeen Malik, 27, grew up in Pakistan but later moved to Saudi Arabia, where she met Syed Farook, 28, in person. The two had corresponded through an online dating service, according to Farook family attorney Mohammad Abuershaid.

That one meeting was all it took for the pair to qualify as an engaged couple for the K-1 — one meeting within two years of the visa application. Farook would have collected evidence of that meeting and filed a petition requesting a K-1 with U.S. immigration officials, the beginning of a process that generally takes six to 12 months and includes medical, background and income checks.

A K-1 visa is easier to obtain than other visas, raising questions about the process and how potentially porous it is.

“I certainly wouldn’t rule out the potential of reforms being implemented in the future to strengthen that program, if we determine that is necessary,” White House spokesman Josh Earnest said Friday.

But David North of the Center for Immigration, a research organization that leans toward restricting immigration, said this was the first time someone admitted to the U.S. on a fiance visa had been accused of murder.

“To the best of my knowledge, we have had aliens from the Middle East killing people in the United States, or trying to do so, on tourist, student and immigrant visas, but this is the first one to be in the K-1 class,” he said.

North noted that applicants for K-1 visas are seldom denied entry to the U.S. In 2014, he said, 304 visas were granted for every denial.

The shooting "certainly means that someone has to consider it and think about" tightening the K-1 process, said Thomas Sanderson, the director of transnational threats at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies.

“It’s a tough question similar to the visa waiver program, which I personally think is the much bigger security threat here."

The waiver program, created in the 1980s, lets passport holders of 38 countries, 30 in Europe, use a reduced-screening system that permits them to visit the United States for 90 days without a visa.

Questions about the fiance visa program came as heated debate continues in the U.S. about the Obama administration’s plan to resettle Syrian refugees. Some critics argue the refugees pose a greater security risk because terrorists may use the resettlement program to enter the country.
White House spokesman Earnest pointed out the vetting program for Syrian requires “the most rigorous, intensive screening of anyone who attempts to enter the United States,” while the screening standards for the fiance visa “are not as strict.”

**Wall Street Journal: “Nation Confronts a New Mance After San Bernardino Shooting”, December 4, 2015**

By Philip Shishkin and Jon Kamp

Even with many details about the San Bernardino, Calif., massacre still unknown, law-enforcement officials see a chilling terror danger from extremist sympathizers who, unnoticed by authorities, are able to amass deadly arsenals to attack vulnerable gatherings anywhere in the U.S.

Much about the case has crystallized trends that officials have feared for years: The attackers, a young married couple with a baby, had never surfaced as subjects of any terror investigation and lived apparently ordinary suburban lives while secretly stockpiling guns, ammunition and homemade bombs.

The attacks Wednesday believed carried out by Syed Rizwan Farook, a religious Muslim and U.S. citizen, and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, a native of Pakistan, targeted a gathering of county workers far from any high-profile metropolis. The couple entered the room armed to kill a lot of people, quickly.

“Terrorists have adapted and evolved in order to carry out heinous plots since 9/11, and this tragedy reinforces the need for law enforcement to evolve its intelligence-gathering and investigative techniques,” said U.S. Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R., Va.), chairman of the House Judiciary Committee.

As the shooting rampage was about to begin, authorities said, Ms. Malik posted a message on Facebook pledging her allegiance to the leader of Islamic State. Pipe bombs later found at the couple’s Redlands, Calif., home echoed designs posted online by the al Qaeda publication, Inspire. The Federal Bureau of Investigation said they had evidence the couple showed signs of radicalization.

An Islamic State-linked news agency said the California shootings were carried out by their supporters, part of string of attacks that included those in Paris last
month, according to SITE Intelligence Group, which tracks online postings by extremists. The claim couldn’t be verified.

U.S. counterterrorism has long focused on people traveling to and from Syria and Iraq. Now, another threat looms from local terrorism sympathizers inspired to violence by Islamic State, but who act without any direct orders, said Lorenzo Vidino, the director of the Program on Extremism at the Center for Cyber & Homeland Security at George Washington University.

People with sympathies but no formal communication or ties with extremist groups can operate under the radar, he said, until they act. “That’s the big threat,” he said.

Unlike the Paris attacks, which were carried out by people whose friendships and family connections appear to have formed the backbone of one or more terrorist cells, the husband and wife in Wednesday’s attack hadn’t trained in Syria and, so far, don’t appear associated with a terrorist cell.

The San Bernardino attack “shows that a small number of people determined to plan but not boast can get away with it,” said Patrick Skinner, a former case officer with the Central Intelligence Agency. “In this way, terrorism is exactly like any other crime.”

The couple, who were killed Wednesday in a gunbattle with police, apparently sought to hide evidence that might connect them to others, law-enforcement officials said. Two relatively new cellular phones were found smashed in a garbage can and a computer in their townhouse was missing a hard drive. Investigators have subpoenaed email service providers to retrieve any communications.

Some questioned whether U.S. and local law-enforcement officials may have missed signs that the couple had become radicalized. Mr. Farook had communicated with at least one FBI terrorism suspect, for instance. But U.S. law enforcement agencies had no case files on either Mr. Farook, an environmental-health specialist who worked for San Bernardino County, or his wife, whom Mr. Farook married during a trip to Saudi Arabia, where she had lived most of her life.
The U.S. has seen similarly motivated attacks. In May, two Phoenix men were killed in a Dallas suburb after they opened fire outside an event that featured cartoon drawings of Islam’s Prophet Muhammad.

One of the men, Elton Simpson, was convicted in 2011 of making a false statement to the FBI after prosecutors said he had planned to join Islamic militant groups in Africa, and then lied about those plans to federal agents, court records show. The other, Nadir Soofi, had grown interested in radical Islamist websites and in Anwar al-Awlaki, the U.S.-born al Qaeda leader whose preaching he had started to follow, his mother told The Wall Street Journal.

In a report released just days before the California shootings, researchers at George Washington University tracked the evolution of Islamist extremism in the U.S. by combing through recent arrests, indictments and convictions for Islamic State-related activities. They found a sharp surge of jihadist activities in the U.S., when compared with the years after the 9/11 attacks.

“In the last few months and weeks we’ve seen online a number of ISIS supporters saying it is tough to travel to join the caliphate, but there are things you can do in the homeland,” said Seamus Hughes, a former official at the National Counterterrorism Center, and one of the report’s authors.

Security and management consultant Ed Davis, who was Boston’s police commissioner in April 2013, when two brothers planted homemade bombs near the Boston Marathon finish line, said the U.S. allowed the couple to buy thousands of bullets without setting off FBI alarm bells. “There should be triggers for that,” he said.

The risk of radicalization has increased, in part, due to better communications technology and widely available encryption tools. “This is the scary part: Technology is such that folks can have secure access to information and plans and have contact with folks located in combat zones in the Middle East,” said David Miller, a partner at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP and a former assistant U.S. attorney in Manhattan, who worked on the first prosecution of a homegrown terrorist cell since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. “And then you have the technological ease by which people can get information on things like building explosives or how to encrypt communications.”

He added: “This is going to continue to be the challenge of our time.”

In his case, three men from suburbs of Toledo were convicted in 2008 of recruiting and training terrorists to kill American soldiers. Mr. Miller said they fed
their radicalization with violent jihad videos they accessed on password-protected Internet sites and through relationships they cultivated online with terrorists in war zones.

The government made its case with the help of an ex-Special Forces soldier who gained the trust of three men by presenting himself as a disenchanted veteran out for revenge against the U.S.


By Jacqueline Klimas

The recruitment of Americans of all walks of life to join the Islamic State is "unprecedented," according to a study released this week from the George Washington University’s Program on Extremism.

The report, titled "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," found that the average age of the American Islamic State sympathizer is 26 and the vast majority are male. More than half have traveled or attempted to travel abroad, 40 percent converted to Islam and authorities have made arrests in 21 states, though there are 900 active investigations ongoing in all 50 states.

"The phenomenon of Americans joining jihadist groups is not new, but the size of the ISIS-related radicalization and mobilization is unprecedented," Lorenzo Vidino, director of the program and one of the authors of the report, said in a statement.

More than a quarter of the 71 people charged for Islamic State-related activities were involved in plots to carry out attacks on American soil and more than half were interested in acting as an undercover agent, the report said.

But beyond those averages, it’s difficult to draw any conclusions about characteristics of those who join because of the diversity among them, Vidino said.

"Other than size, diversity is the other main characteristic of this phenomenon. We have seen cases in big cities and rural towns. The
individuals involved range from hardened militants to teenage girls, petty criminals and college students," he said.

In addition to differences in race, age, social class, education and family background, their motivations are also diverse and "defy easy analysis," the report said.

One of the initial driving factors for many young Americans to become interested in the Syrian civil war was “an underlying sense of sympathy and compassion” when pictures began surfacing of the dire living conditions under Syrian President Bashar Assad, the report said. Westerners who support the Islamic State also are often searching for a sense of belonging or their own identity.


By Hugo Gurdon

When President Obama blames climate change for stoking terrorism, he’s trying to play us all for saps. He’s doing what Hollywood exploitation movies have done since the 1920s — latching on to a widespread fear, mixing in lurid content and hoping to turn it to his profit.

Quick and dirty movie-making was low and clever. But Obama’s exploitation is only disreputable, not smart. It makes him an even more distant and discredited leader, hopelessly out of touch with the legitimate fears of the public whose mind he wants to change.

Speaking on "CBS This Morning," the president said, "As human beings are placed under strain [from climate change], then bad things happen… If you look at world history, whenever people are desperate, when people start lacking food, when people are not able to make a living or take care of their families, that’s when ideologies arise that are dangerous."

ABC News: “Sister of San Bernardino Shooter Hopes to Give Orphaned Niece ‘Stable Upbringing’”, December 5, 2015
By Emily Shapiro, Nikki Battiste, Sabina Ghebremedhin, and Zunaira Zaki

The older sister of Syed Farook, one of the suspected shooters in Wednesday’s deadly San Bernardino rampage, said she and her husband hope to adopt the 6-month-old baby girl left behind by her brother and his wife, who were both killed by police in a shootout.

Saira Khan, Farook’s sister and Tashfeen Malik’s sister-in-law, told ABC News she and her husband, Farhan Khan, could give the orphaned baby "a stable upbringing."

"For the time being, we want her to enjoy her innocence," Saira Khan told ABC News' Kayna Whitworth. "You know, we don't want her to know everything, but I think eventually she will find out probably on her own."

San Bernardino County Sheriff John McMahon told ABC News "federal authorities, in conjunction with the county’s child protective services, took custody of that child, and at some point in the next week, they will have a dependency hearing in the County of San Bernardino to determine where, ultimately, that child will live, at least in the short term."

The Khans, who have a 2-year-old girl and 7-year-old boy of their own, told ABC News they hope to have their niece by Monday.

Malik, 29, who is from Pakistan but had lived in Saudi Arabia, came to the U.S. last summer on a "fiancé" visa and later obtained a Green Card, U.S. officials have said. Malik married Farook, an American of Pakistani descent, in August 2014 and the couple had a baby daughter six months ago.

Malik and Farook unleashed a deadly attack in San Bernardino on Wednesday, killing 14 people and injuring another 21, an act now being investigated as terrorism.

In the last 21 months, at least 71 people in the U.S. were charged with ISIS-related activities, including 10 women, according to authorities. Some have been mothers, like Malik.

"They're prioritizing martyrdom above all other aspects of their life, including raising a family," Audrey Alexander, a fellow with the George Washington University program on extremism, told ABC News' Martha Raddatz.
"It’s harder for us to understand, especially knowing that he was our brother and he was so happy with her," Saira Khan said. "How can he leave his only child, you know? And how could the mother do this?"

Saira Khan called Wednesday's deadly shooting "horrific," and to the victims, she said, "We can’t begin to imagine what they’re going through."

"We feel for them," she said.

Miami Herald: “Woman in deadly California rampage had become more devout”, December 5, 2015

By Amanda Lee Myers and Brian Skoloff

SAN BERNARDINO, CALIF.
A change came over Tashfeen Malik two or three years ago.
She started dressing more conservatively, wearing a scarf that covered nearly all her face, and became more devout in her Muslim faith, according to some who knew her in Pakistan.

But her path from there to the bloody events of this past week – when she and her husband slaughtered 14 people in a commando-style shooting rampage – remains a mystery, with FBI officials, family lawyers and others saying they know little about the 29-year-old housewife and new mother.

As the FBI announced Friday that it is investigating the massacre as a terrorist attack, law enforcement authorities and others offered evidence that Malik held radical beliefs and shared them online, posting praise for the Islamic State group on Facebook at about the same moment she and her American-born husband, Syed Farook, 28, launched the rampage.

The turn in the investigation raised a host of questions, among them:

▪ If the couple was radicalized, when, where and how did it happen?
▪ If it happened before Malik came to the U.S., did counterterrorism authorities miss any warning signs when they investigated her before approving her visa?
▪ Which of them was the driving force in the attack?
“Malik seems to be a very nebulous figure,” said Natana DeLong-Bas, an assistant professor of theology at Boston College. She said the case should cause people to rethink some of their assumptions about extremism.

“We always seem to assume only a man would be capable of making a terrorist attack,” DeLong-Bas said. “Because we know so little about Tashfeen Malik, it’s possible she might have been the main organizer in this event and talked her husband into doing it.”

Husband and wife were killed in a furious shootout with police hours after they put on battle gear and stormed a social service center with assault rifles, opening fire on a gathering of Farook’s colleagues from the San Bernardino County health department, where he worked as a restaurant inspector.

A U.S. law enforcement official said Malik used a Facebook alias to pledge her allegiance to the Islamic State group and its leader. And a Facebook official said Malik praised Islamic State in a post at the start of the attack. Both spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

Similarly, U.S. officials said Farook had been in contact with extremists via social media, but one official said those contacts were not recent and did not involve any significant players on the FBI’s radar.

FBI Director James Comey would not discuss whether anyone affiliated with IS communicated back, but he said there was no indication yet that the plot was directed by any other foreign terror group.

“The investigation so far has developed indications of radicalization by the killers and of potential inspiration by foreign terrorist organizations,” Comey said. He cautioned that the investigation has not yet shown evidence the couple was part of a larger group.

Despite signs of the couple’s radicalization, there “is a lot of evidence that doesn’t quite make sense” at this early stage, he said.

The Farook family attorneys, Chesley and Mohammad Abuershaid, said none of his relatives had any indication either Farook or his wife held extremist views.

“If the most evidence there is to any affiliation is a Facebook account under another person’s name … then that’s hardly anything at all,” Chesley said.
He and Abuershaid said the family was shocked by the attack and mourns for the victims. They cautioned against rushing to judgment on their motivations.

David Bowdich, head of the FBI’s Los Angeles office, said “a number of pieces of evidence” point to terrorism and that the agency was focused on that idea “for good reason.” He would not elaborate.

Bowdich said investigators were looking carefully to determine if there is a connection to IS.

Farook was born in Chicago to Pakistani parents and raised in Southern California. Malik arrived in the U.S. in 2014 on a Pakistani passport and a fiancee visa but had spent extended periods of time in Saudi Arabia.

She started studying pharmacy at Bahauddin Zakariya University in the Pakistani city of Multan in 2012.

A maid who worked in the Multan home where Malik lived said that Malik initially wore a scarf that covered her head but not her face. A year before she got married, she began wearing a scarf that covered all but her nose and eyes, the maid said. The maid spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of jeopardizing her employment with the family.

A relative of Malik’s in Pakistan, Hifza Batool, reported hearing similar things from other family members about Malik, her step-niece.

“I recently heard it from relatives that she has become a religious person, and she often tells people to live according to the teachings of Islam,” said Batool, a teacher who lives in Karor Lal Esan, about 280 miles southwest of the Pakistani capital of Islamabad.

A Facebook official said Malik praised Islamic State in a post at 11 a.m. Wednesday, around the time the couple stormed a social service center where Farook’s co-workers from San Bernardino County’s health department had gathered.

An Islamic State-affiliated news service called Malik and Farook “supporters” of their Islamist cause but stopped short of claiming responsibility for the attack.

The U.S. official who revealed the Facebook post was not authorized to discuss the case publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. The Facebook official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity because the person was not allowed
under corporate policy to be quoted by name, said the company discovered Wednesday’s post the next day, removed the profile from public view and reported its contents to law enforcement.

Farook and Malik rented a townhome in Redlands, a few miles from the attack scene, where investigators said they found an arsenal of ammunition and homemade bombs.

On Friday morning, the property’s owner allowed reporters inside. The surreal scene – reporters walking among baby items, handling family photos and looking at dirty dishes in a sink – was broadcast live on cable TV.

While it appeared unseemly, Bowdich said the FBI had finished investigating the home. Among things authorities had found were two cellphones that had been crushed in an apparent attempt to destroy the information inside. Investigators were trying to retrieve the data.

“We hope that will take us to their motivation,” Bowdich said.

Until Friday, federal and local law enforcement officials said terrorism was a possibility but that the violence could have stemmed from a workplace grudge. The Farook family attorneys said he told relatives he had been teased at work about his beard.

They described Malik as a devoted home-keeper who closely followed religious traditions. They said Farook’s mother never saw any of the weapons or bombs authorities found. The FBI questioned her Wednesday night and, according to the attorneys, said they would not release her until Farook’s siblings came for questioning.

The couple’s orphaned daughter is in the care of child protective services and the family will try to recover her next week.

Farook had no criminal record, and neither he nor his wife was under scrutiny by local or federal law enforcement before the attack, authorities said.

Malik, 27, reportedly moved from her home country of Pakistan to Saudi Arabia and eventually came to the U.S. in 2014 on a fiancée visa. However, Saudi authorities say there is no record of her ever being a resident there.

Farook, a restaurant inspector for the county, was born in Chicago to Pakistani parents and raised in Southern California.
Farook went to the Dar Al Uloom Al Islamiyah of America mosque in San Bernardino every day but abruptly stopped coming three weeks ago. While many members said they knew Farook and described him as quiet and very studious, “no one knows anything about his wife,” said Mahmood Nadvi, son of the mosque’s founder.

Nadvi said FBI agents have questioned the mosque’s leaders about the couple. Law enforcement officials have long warned that Americans acting in sympathy with Islamic extremists – though not on direct orders – could launch an attack inside the U.S. Using slick propaganda, the Islamic State in particular has urged sympathizers worldwide to commit violence in their countries.

Others have done so. In May, just before he attacked a gathering in Texas of people drawing cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, a Phoenix man tweeted his hope that Allah would view him as a holy warrior.

Two weeks ago, with Americans on edge over the Islamic State attacks in Paris that left 130 people dead, Comey said that U.S. authorities had no specific or credible intelligence pointing to an attack on American soil.

Since March 2014, 71 people have been charged in the U.S. in connection with supporting IS, including 56 this year, according to a recent report from the George Washington University Program on Extremism. Though most are men, “women are taking an increasingly prominent role in the jihadist world,” the report said.

Voice of America: “Role of Terrorism in Shooting Causes Multiple Concerns, Fears”, December 5, 2015

By Carol Guensburn, Katherine Gypson, and Iran Mellman

Links between the Islamic State group and Tashfeen Malik, which the Pakistani native confirmed just before she and her husband opened fire with automatic rifles and slaughtered 14 people in California on Wednesday, have greatly expanded concerns about foreign terrorists’ influence on American soil.
Malik, 29, and her American-born husband, Syed Rizwan Farook, 28, are now the principal focus of an enormous effort by U.S. authorities to discover what motivated or inspired the couple to plan and carry out the attacks, which primarily targeted Farook’s co-workers in California’s San Bernardino County, east of Los Angeles.

Malik and Farook fled the bloodbath and were at large for several hours Wednesday, until they tried to shoot their way out of a police cordon and died in a volley of hundreds of bullets.

Before that bloody ending, however, a message apparently posted by Malik appeared on Facebook in which she pledged allegiance to the Islamic State terror group, and specifically to its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in Syria.

The post was removed a day later, but messages circulated by Islamic State Saturday claimed Malik and Farook as "soldiers" and "supporters" of the extremist group. IS online radio broadcasts described them as "martyrs."

Terror claims

The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s David Bowdich, in charge of that agency's Los Angeles office, appeared before reporters late Friday and announced: "We are now investigating these horrific acts as an act of terrorism."

Bowdich and other law-enforcement officials in California have steered clear of specifically tying Malik and Farook's actions to Islamic extremism. But many investigators and experts who study extremist groups suspect Islamic State’s claims about the California couple may be borne out.

The San Bernardino shootings could be seen as the worst assault on the United States by Islamic extremists since the multiple attacks on New York and Washington by al-Qaida-sponsored terrorists on September 11, 2001.

Nearly 3,000 people died then – in New York at the site of former World Trade Center, at the Pentagon outside Washington, D.C., and at a rural site in Pennsylvania. Hijacked commercial airliners crashed at each location.

Since the Islamic State group became a fierce and notoriously brutal force in recent years in Iraq and Syria, it has called repeatedly on its followers to stage violent attacks against the United States as well as U.S. coalition partners in Europe and the Gulf.

Whether Islamic State inspired or directed the attack, "there’s value for ISIS to claim it either way," the director of transnational threats at the Washington-
based Center for Strategic and International Studies said, using another acronym for the group.

A claim lends credibility to the call to battle, Thomas Sanderson explained. "It strikes fear in the hearts of Americans," he said. "I think it makes Americans feel to some degree uniformly vulnerable because this was a strike at an office and not a strike on a financial center or a strike on the Pentagon or the FBI headquarters."

A confirmed link between IS and one or both assailants would also expand "the spectrum of attack techniques," he added.

Assailants’ demographics

Seamus Hughes, co-author of a new report, "ISIS in America," was not surprised by Malik's role in the California bloodbath.

Women have been active in various terrorist groups and, "in terms of ISIS, they've played various roles as radicalizers and recruits and propagandists," said Hughes, deputy director of The George Washington University’s program on extremism.

The new study on terrorist infiltration found up to 300 Americans or U.S.-based people sympathetic to the Islamic State group who are active on social media. A third of them are women.

Hughes said there is no "typical profile when it comes to ISIS recruits," but he found a husband-and-wife attack team notable: "In terms of the couple, that is a unique dynamic."

It is not clear whether whether Malik or Farook first became radicalized, or when and where. The couple deleted computer files and smashed cellphones to slow investigators’ search for clues and connections.

They reportedly met first online. Malik was living in Saudi Arabia; Farook visited there and Pakistan last year, returning with Malik, who was granted a U.S. visa as his fiancée. Neither was on a watch list, according to authorities.

The couple married in the United States and had a baby daughter about six months ago.

Sanderson speculated Farook "may have decided to marry someone so that he would look less suspicious.... This is a guy who grew up in America. He may have thought that, with a wife and a child, he may not attract … attention."
Or Malik may have taken the lead.

"Every radicalization process is different. That's what makes it so difficult to identify," said Colin Clarke, a RAND Corp. researcher who focuses on insurgency and counterinsurgency. "There's no one single prototype that individuals follow. So there probably were signs that could have been picked up by people who knew them."

Immigration

Malik entered the United States on a fiancée visa, which may ratchet up already-heightened interest in how newcomers are screened.

The coordinated November 13 terrorist attacks in Paris focused attention on refugee resettlement and, more recently, on visa waivers. The White House this week announced tighter screening for the latter program, used by about 20 million visitors to the United States each year.

To get a U.S. fiancée visa, or K-1 nonimmigrant visa, requires rigorous screening, says Palma Yanni, a past president of the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

Applicants face a battery of security hurdles, including repeated biometric and biographic testing, international checks for financial and criminal records, and interviews at a U.S. consulate, Yanni said. "The goal is a five-month processing time, but frequently [it's] been longer than that."

Yanni pointed out applicants must marry within 90 days of entering the United States and must file another set of papers to confirm they married.

"Knowing how many security checks are done, what more can we do, administer truth serum?" she wondered. "... I hope there's no change in policy based on a Facebook posting."


By Dave Clark

Washington (AFP) - The Islamic State group's claim to have inspired this week's San Bernardino massacre raises the question of what kind of threat it poses after
a year which has seen record numbers of alleged jihadists arrested in the United States.

Much is unclear about the motivation of the young Muslim couple who allegedly attacked the husband’s co-workers at a workplace holiday party in San Bernardino, California on Wednesday, killing 14.

But the FBI is investigating the attack as an act of terrorism after finding evidence that the pair were inspired by extremist ideology and may have made an online pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State group.

This came as a surprise to many as the nondescript target was not a symbolic site and the couple -- recent parents Syed Farook, 28, and Tashfeen Malik, 29 -- are not thought to have been on any watch list.

But perhaps the attack, which otherwise bore the usual hallmarks of the mass shootings that have become so common in the United States, should not have surprised?

Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, head of research at the international Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence, told AFP trouble has been long brewing.

"Since at least 2010 jihadist strategists and ideologues have called on and inspired Muslims in the West to do one of two things: Either join a jihadist group fighting abroad or, if they are going to stay in the countries which are waging a supposed war on Islam, they should carry out attacks using any means at their disposal," he said.

- High-powered firearms -

Despite its leading role in overseas military actions against Islamist networks like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group, the United States does not face a domestic jihadist threat on the scale of its European allies.

"However, in Europe so-called 'lone wolf' attackers cannot easily get their hands on high-powered firearms," Meleagrou-Hitchens told AFP.

"The problem for the United States is that these type of jihadists can arm themselves, legally, and then become almost as deadly as highly trained jihadists with formal connections to groups abroad."
"For me, it has always been a matter of time before a group of homegrown jihadists in America got their hands on firearms and carried out an attack like this, it is such an obvious and easy thing to do."

This year has seen record numbers of arrests of suspected extremists, many of them victims of FBI sting operations but others with ties to foreign groups deemed "terrorist organizations" under US law.

According to a major study of US jihadists released this week by George Washington University, 250 Americans have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria or Iraq to fight for the IS group's so-called "caliphate."

There are 900 active investigations against alleged IS sympathizers spread across all 50 US states and 71 have been charged with "IS-related" activities since March. Fifty-six of these suspects were arrested this year.

In the case of Wednesday's attack, however, the FBI has found no evidence that the couple was acting directly on behalf of an IS leader.

It was not until Saturday that IS called the perpetrators "soldiers" of its caliphate in an English-language radio broadcast and "supporters" in Arabic.

Experts following the threat said the core group seemed as surprised as anyone by the attacks.

Rita Katz, director of private terror watchdog the SITE Intelligence Group, told AFP that during last month's IS attacks in Paris the group had flooded the Internet with celebratory propaganda, some of it apparently pre-prepared.

But this week, the usual jihadist online forums were silent until news emerged from the US investigation that the couple were Muslims who had met in Saudi Arabia and had apparently found their own way to radicalization.

- 'Flooding Twitter' -

"They didn't celebrate it. It was nothing compared to what we usually see. It took them two days to come out with anything," Katz told AFP. "Now if you go on Twitter, it's a totally different story. They're flooding Twitter now."

Katz said police photographs of pipe bombs the couple had prepared resembled the detailed diagrams provided for so-called "lone wolf" attackers in Al-Qaeda's online English language magazine "Inspire."
And the suspects’ decision to mount their own raid rather than joining an organized cell reflected instructions posted in the Islamic State’s publication "Dabiq" -- named after the Syrian village where the group expects to make its last stand against infidel forces at the world's end.

The second edition of Dabiq published in July last year told supporters who were unable to make a pilgrimage to fight for the caliphate; to pledge allegiance, or "bayat" in Arabic, to the IS leader; and to launch domestic attacks.

"Try to record these bayat and then distribute them through all forms of media including the Internet," it said.

This, FBI agents now believe, is what Malik did -- and the couple, while apparently having carried out the deadliest jihadist attack on US soil since September 11, are not an anomaly.

In May of this year, two gunmen attacked a conference in Garland, Texas, which was hosting cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed designed to be offensive to some Muslims. Police suspect the attackers were self-radicalized jihadists.

And Wednesday's attackers were not even the first young US couple tempted by the movement. Earlier this year, 22-year-old Mohammad Oda Dakhlla and 19-year-old Jaelyn Delshaun Young were arrested as they prepared to head to Syria.


By Alexia Fernandez Campbell

Islamic State recruitment and mobilization in the United States is reaching “unprecedented” and “historic” levels, according to experts on violent extremism. It’s still not as big a problem here as it is in Europe, but ISIS is now reaching Americans at a faster pace than than al-Qaida ever did.

As of October, law enforcement authorities knew of 250 Americans who had traveled or tried to travel to Syria or Iraq to join ISIS fighters. And there are about 900 active investigations against ISIS sympathizers in all 50 states.
These alarming statistics were unveiled today by analysts at the George Washington University Program on Extremism. The center spent the past six months monitoring ISIS supporters on social media and researching FBI court files. They found that Americans who join ISIS—or those who flirt with the idea—come from all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. People arrested this year in connection to the terrorist group include an African-American woman from Mississippi State University and a white man from suburban Cincinnati who recently converted to Islam.

Most of them were “groomed” by ISIS supporters through social-media networks such as Twitter and Instagram, according to the report. And many embraced the group’s radical interpretation of Islam as a way to find belonging and a sense of personal identity.

Since March 2014, prosecutors have charged 71 people with ISIS-related activities in the United States. Charges include attempting to support a known terrorist organization to plotting deadly attacks on U.S. soil. Most of the arrests—56—took place this year. That is the largest number of terrorism-related arrests in one year since September 2001.

The center analyzed case files for the 71 arrests and discovered that:

- ISIS recruits are young. Their average age is 26.
- Most of them are men (86 percent).
- Half of those arrested traveled or tried to travel to Iraq or Syria.
- About 27 percent were involved in plots to carry out attacks in the United States.
- The vast majority are American citizens (58) and another six had green cards.
- About 40 percent of those arrested are converts to Islam. Since only about 23 of American Muslims are converts, this group is overrepresented among ISIS supporters.
- These arrests happened in 21 states, with the largest number in New York, followed by Minnesota.
- Three Americans have died in the United States from ISIS-related violence.

By Andrea Noble and Guy Taylor

The San Bernardino terrorist attack is underscoring fears that the government and wider U.S. society have failed to effectively address and counter the threat of ordinary American Muslims becoming radicalized.

The Obama administration has essentially conceded that its counterradicalization strategy faces major challenges despite millions of dollars spent in recent years.

Top law enforcement officials have asserted in the wake of San Bernardino that the most effective tool for preventing homegrown attacks remains the post-9/11 “see something, say something” campaign.

“When you see that person slipping off the grid, changing into someone that you no longer know, and gives you concern for that, we are no longer in a time where that kind of thing can be left aside,” said Attorney General Loretta Lynch.

Ms. Lynch and FBI Director James Comey have emphasized the importance of a general public wary of suspicious behavior as key to the fight against terrorist attacks, especially since the FBI failed to find a link between the San Bernardino killers Syed Rizwan Farook, 28, and his Pakistani-born wife, Tashfeen Malik, 27, and any terrorist group or cell.

“We keep urging people to tell us when they see something because that is often our only way to get visibility to someone who is changing,” Mr. Comey said.

They said public vigilance is vital to countering the threat posed by radicalized Islamists as well as deranged non-Muslims such as 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooter Adam Lanza and white supremacist Dylann Storm Roof, who carried out the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church massacre in June.

But the emphasis on “see something, say something” also serves as an indictment of the government’s alternative efforts to try to combat the specific threat of radicalization of Muslim-Americans. Mr. Comey on Friday openly...
lamented major hurdles in the government’s attempt to promote community-level programs to prevent radicalization from such extremist propaganda as that spewed digitally by the Middle Eastern-based Islamic State, also known as ISIS and ISIL.

A central part of the challenge, the FBI director says, is the sheer level of diversity among people who have been found to get involved in violent extremism. “It isn’t a particular demographic or geography; it’s about people seeking meaning in their lives in a misguided way,” Mr. Comey said.

“We find particularly ISIL’s message resonating with kids, and so we are trying to figure out who they are,” he said. “It’s very hard to nail down. That’s why we do this work in all 50 states.

“People who are struggling and trying to find a center in their life and all of a sudden buzzing in their pocket is someone offering them what appears to be a centering in the most meaningful way,” he said. “If it involves someone radicalizing privately, it’s very hard for us to spot them.”

No lead agency

The Obama administration first vowed to get serious about fighting radicalization in 2011 when it launched the Homeland Security Department’s Countering Violent Extremism program.

At the time, administration officials broadly touted how the plan would fund social and law enforcement programs that would target grass-roots-level outreach across the nation.

Critics argued that the plan lacked focus during its initial years. With the Islamic State suddenly rising as a major jihadi propaganda force on the world stage, the administration sought to revamp its strategy by holding the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism in February.

The summit brought together civic and religious leaders from across the U.S. and around the world. President Obama requested $15 million to fund Justice Department community-level counterradicalization programs in the U.S. for 2015.

Critics said he was focusing too broadly on “extremism” in general and not putting sufficient emphasis on “Islamic extremism” in the face of the Islamic State’s surging digital propaganda platform, which features an English-language recruitment magazine as well as dozens of flashy online videos.
Some said the overall Countering Violent Extremism program was lacking clear leadership. A 2014 Congressional Research Service report called out the administration for failing to name a specific lead agency for the effort. “Without a lead agency, it may be difficult to monitor the levels of federal funding devoted to CVE efforts and how many personnel are devoted to CVE in the federal government,” the report said.

Republicans have been most critical. Just as the San Bernardino attacks were unfolding last week, lawmakers examining the administration’s strategy for countering the Islamic State’s digital propaganda ripped the White House for not doing more.

“The administration has promised a strategy to counter online radicalization,” Rep. Ted Poe, Texas Republican, said at a House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing on Wednesday. “That was in 2011. Four years later, we’re still waiting on the strategy.”

House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Michael T. McCaul, also of Texas, has been critiquing the Countering Violent Extremism program for months. In June, he introduced legislation to establish an office of coordination for countering violent extremism within the Department of Homeland Security and to create a specific countermessaging program to use social media against online propaganda embraced by Islamic State recruiters and sympathizers.

But the full Republican-controlled House has yet to get behind the bill, which passed unanimously through committee but has not to come up for a full floor vote.

Mr. McCaul took up the issue again Sunday, telling Fox News that “we need to do a much better job of trying to identify the early warning signs of radicalization.”

But he also conceded that the San Bernardino case exposed serious challenges. “There were no flags or warning signs in this particular case,” he said. “Volume is so high and the chatter is so high that it’s almost impossible to stop it all.

“We are ramping up our efforts, but you can’t be right every time,” he said.

The danger of profiling

A recent analysis by George Washington University’s Program on Extremism, meanwhile, found that there is no “standard recruit profile” for those who
embrace Islamic State ideology after they are introduced to propaganda or recruited online.

Of 71 people arrested on suspicion of plotting or helping support the Islamic State since March 2014, 10 were women, one-third were younger than 21 and 40 percent were recent converts to Islam. The arrests were made in 21 states.

Such factors add a layer of complexity to another challenge that was pointed out in the 2014 Congressional Research Service report, which noted that the “2.75 million Muslims in the United States have divergent sectarian points of view, come from many ethnic or national backgrounds, and live in a variety of areas.”

There is also “little consensus among American Muslims regarding national advocacy groups,” according to the report, which pointed to a survey in which 55 percent of Muslim-American men and 42 percent of Muslim-American women responded “none do,” when asked which of a list of Muslim-American organizations represented their interests.

The report argued that such figures could make it difficult for U.S. officials to determine what organizations to select as partners in any grass-roots-level counterradicalization strategy.

On a separate front, the document also cited the risks associated with giving law enforcement and intelligence-gathering agencies too central a role in the strategy, suggesting that their explicit involvement could backfire by spurring mistrust in certain communities.

“Without a high degree of transparency,” the report said, “[it] may run the risk of being perceived as an effort to co-opt communities into the security process — providing tips, leads, sources, and informants.”

In the interim, concern raised by Muslim and Arab advocacy groups appears to have at least temporarily derailed one FBI program associated with the administration’s Countering Violent Extremism effort.

Meant to launch in early November, the “Don’t Be a Puppet” online interactive program was developed for teachers and students as a means to identify someone who might be falling prey to radical extremists.

But a Nov. 3 posting on the website of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, a group advocating for the civil rights of American Muslims, maintained that the program had been “suspended.”
“MPAC, along with a few other advocacy groups, were invited to preview the program at a meeting with the FBI two weeks ago,” the group said. “We raised serious concerns about how it improperly characterized American Muslims as a suspect community with its targeted focus and stereotypical depictions and how it could exasperate the problem by leading to bullying, bias, and religious profiling of students.”

The conservative advocacy group Judicial Watch was outraged, asserting in its own statement that the FBI had irresponsibly “nixed” the program “after Muslim rights groups whipped out the discrimination card.”

The FBI was vague about the program’s status when pressed by The Washington Times, asserting only that the bureau “is developing a website designed to provide awareness about the dangers of violent extremist predators on the Internet, with input from students, educators and community leaders.”

While tension over such matters lurks in the background, the White House has been quick to defend its overall Countering Violent Extremism efforts in the wake of the San Bernardino attack.

Administration spokesman Josh Earnest told reporters Friday that an FBI “community outreach program” in Minneapolis — which has a large Somali-American Muslim population — saw “the U.S. government and some law enforcement elements of the U.S. government work effectively with the local Muslim community to counter radicalization efforts and in some cases even prevent terrorist attacks.”

Mr. Obama made similar points when he addressed the nation Sunday night about the San Bernardino attack and the broader threat of terrorism.


WASHINGTON (CBSDC)— There are as many as 300 supporters of the Islamic State militant group online in the United States, according to a new study.

George Washington University researchers from the program on extremism found that recruiters are using Twitter to encourage ISIS-supporters to travel to Iraq and Syria, as reported by Pop Herald.

The study found there are hundreds of American supporters who are often active on Twitter and potentially being recruited from the group abroad.
“The individuals range from hardened militants to teenage girls, petty criminals and college students,” Lorenzo Vidino, the director of the university’s program on extremism, said. “A small number of Americans have wholeheartedly embraced their new-found ISIS support system online.”

Study authors and other officials have warned that the Islamic State’s influence through the internet has been capable of brainwashing Americans to become more radicalized.

The study also found that most of the group’s supporters online speak English and that 58 of the arrested suspects are US citizens. Communication and support for the group also expands to other social media including Facebook, Google+, and apps like Kik and Telegram. The researchers found that most users supporting the group could be categorized as generating content, retweeting content, or giving “shout-outs” to the group.

“American accounts, like the larger ISIS echo chamber, tend not to tolerate dissent and silence attempts at nuance”, the report states. “Many U.S.-based Muslim scholars and activists, even those from conservative backgrounds, are subject to routine death threats”.

The Daily Beast: “Can Muslim Americans Stop ISIS?”, December 7, 2015

By Dean Obeidallah

President Obama’s national address Sunday night on defeating ISIS evoked a mix of reactions. Some praised the President for laying out specifics in the war versus ISIS. While on the right some were outraged Obama didn’t utter the words “radical Islam”—as if Obama saying this phrase will magically cause the leaders in ISIS to respond: “Well, they got us now—everyone go home.”

The reaction of the Muslim American community was unsurprisingly also a mixed bag. There was unanimous praise from Muslim Americans for the President making it clear that this is not a “a war between America and Islam.” Obama was also cheered for noting that ISIS is “a cult of death, and they account for a tiny fraction of more than a billion Muslims.” And especially for his point that the number one victim of groups like ISIS are Muslims.
But then comes the split within our community. And it’s one that I personally can relate to since I, too, am conflicted.

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But here’s thing that many aren’t aware of. Before Obama’s call on Sunday night for Muslims to counter ISIS, there has been a concerted effort to do just that. Farhana Khan, the executive director of Muslim advocates, explained, “Imams and Muslim religious leaders in America have been challenging intolerant, deviant interpretations of Islam.”

And Edina Lekovic of the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) was on my SiriusXM radio show this past Saturday discussing MPAC’s work over the past few years on this front. As Lekovic explained, MPAC’s “Safe Spaces Initiative” works with Imams and Muslim community leaders on assisting them to prevent radicalization and counter the recruitment efforts of terrorist groups like ISIS.

But Lekovic noted that the challenge is that these lone wolf terrorists are in general neither part of the Muslim community nor attending mosques. Or if they are mosque goers like it appears the San Bernardino shooter was, the radicalization doesn’t occur there but rather online.

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By Ismat Sarah Mangla

Now that the FBI has deemed last week’s mass shooting in San Bernardino, California, an act of terrorism, new questions are arising about how perpetrators Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, may have been radicalized, and whether anything could have prevented it. Those questions are at the heart of government-led programs called Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) in the United States, which aim to prevent individuals from being swayed by extremist ideologies.

Such efforts have gained traction in recent years, but Muslim community leaders often don’t agree on how to implement them, or even if they should be implemented at all.

“Domestic CVE efforts are in the nascent stages,” said Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University’s Center for Cyber and Homeland Security. “The administration has not put serious resources behind this effort, and the community partners are all doing it on a shoestring budget.”

While many European countries have long had CVE efforts in place, the U.S. government only officially launched a CVE strategy in 2011, and that strategy went through a rocky implementation process due to lack of resources.
and focus. It gained greater attention earlier this year when the Obama administration held a high-profile “White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism” that brought together local, federal and international leaders to discuss steps communities can take to counter radicalization. The government worked with three cities -- Boston, Los Angeles and Minneapolis -- to create pilot programs that foster partnerships between local governments, law enforcement, local Muslim communities and more.

'Surveillance States'

But some Muslim communities and civil rights organizations argue that such efforts led by the government are not effective at reducing violence -- and often infringe on the rights of Muslim-Americans by essentially creating “surveillance states” within Muslim communities.

Critics were most vocal after a House bill introduced by U.S. Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, proposed the creation of a CVE office within the Department of Homeland Security. Some 42 civil rights organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union, the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, signed an open letter in July decrying the bill as a threat to “freedom of speech, association and religion” if passed.

Rabiah Ahmed, a spokeswoman for the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), one of the signatories of the letter, said that government-led CVE programs are simply not effective. “When it comes to intervention and prevention, CVE needs to be community-led. When a person crosses the point of no return, that’s when law enforcement agencies need to take over,” Ahmed said.

MPAC has created its own CVE module that Muslim communities can implement called “Safe Spaces.”

“It’s a toolkit that provides a model for mosques and communities to implement when tackling violent extremism, based on prevention and intervention,” said Ahmed, adding that several mosques around the country, including her own in northern Virginia, have implemented MPAC’s strategies.

But Ahmed added that it can be difficult to reach those who are at risk for radicalization, because they often pull away from their communities at large, as they don’t easily find sympathy for their views. “That poses a challenge to us [Muslim-Americans] because they are out of our reach,” she said.
In the end, though, it’s difficult to know whether these efforts are having any effect on radicalization. “The most difficult question when you talk about prevention is: how do you prove the negative on these things?” said Hughes.

See Something, Say Something?

Another challenge, said Hughes, is that most local communities don’t know how to proceed when they notice that there might be a problem with a community member who is heading down a trajectory toward radicalization. Even if such a person does pull away from the community, “there’s usually a friend or family member who saw something concerning, but didn’t know how to respond.”

There’s also the legitimate fear that alerting the authorities will send a person to prison or worse.

“There’s only a subset of people you should arrest,” said Hughes. “But there is a subset of people you can reach. So we need a viable third way that’s not just calling your local FBI or ignoring the situation. We need programs where you can say, ‘I’m concerned about my loved one’ and talk to mental health professionals, social workers, religious leaders.”

Rabia Chaudry, an attorney and national security fellow at the New America Foundation, has worked as a CVE consultant and says that many Muslim communities in the U.S. have shut down the conversation on CVE out of legitimate concerns about civil rights and marginalization.

“What is the right balance for Muslim leadership to strike? We haven’t even been able to have these conversations because it’s been made into such a controversial issue by anti-CVE activists within the community,” said Chaudry.

But she adds that extremists can reach teenage Muslims in seconds via social media and the Internet, and that Muslim communities need to get their heads out of the sand. It’s up to the community itself, she says, to develop the “third way” that Hughes describes.

“This is one of the greatest failures of our Muslim leadership. They have failed to create a viable alternative beyond straight prosecution because we don’t allow, much less take the lead on, these conversations,” said Chaudry. “We should go head to head on these issues with local leaders and government. You want us to engage on CVE? Then promise us that if our community leaders engage on these issues, create off-ramps and interventions, they’re not going to go to jail. They won’t get caught up in a terror probe or the target of bigotry. We need to
take these demands to the government as a community. The government is not going to do it.”

Minneapolis Star Tribune: “State Dept.: ‘Mujahid Miski’ surrenders to Somali authorities”, December 7, 2015

By Libor Jany

A former Minneapolis high school student considered one of Minnesota’s most-wanted terror suspects surrendered in November to authorities in Somalia, U.S. Department of State officials revealed on Monday.

Mohamed Abdullahi Hassan, whose jihadi moniker was "Mujahid Miski," has been under indictment since 2009 for charges including providing material support to a terrorist organization and conspiracy to kill abroad. Hassan is on the FBI’s list of the top nine terror suspects from Minnesota.

He is thought to have communicated with Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant sympathizers on the East Coast and in the South, including a gunman who opened fire at a controversial prophet Mohammed cartoon contest in May.

Authorities on Monday denied earlier news reports linking Hassan to a couple with ISIL sympathies who shot and killed 14 people in San Bernardino, Calif., last week.

Hassan turned himself in to Somali authorities on Nov. 6 and is in the custody of the country’s intelligence agency in the capital, Mogadishu, said Pooja Jhunjhunwala, a State Department spokeswoman. She said that U.S. officials were "discussing this case" with the Somali government, but noted that the two countries don’t have an extradition treaty.

Hassan, who has been connected to a group of Twin Cities men recently charged with trying to join ISIL, was among the second wave of Minnesota men of East African descent who joined Al-Shabab, Al-Qaida's offshoot in Somalia, in 2008.

Before his Twitter account went dark in June, Hassan often posted ISIL propaganda, calling on affiliates to carry out so-called "lone wolf-style" attacks against targets in
the West. He resurfaced online after months of silence, dispelling speculation that he had been captured or killed by Al-Shabab fighters for his pro-ISIL stances.

Seamus Hughes, deputy director of George Washington University’s program on extremism, said that while Hassan had fled the U.S. to join Al-Shabab, he had built a large online following as one of ISIL’s leading recruiters.

"The question is whether he’s a fighter or a propagandist, and I’m not sure that we’ve seen any evidence that he’s on the front lines," Hughes said by phone Monday. "In any event, he’s an important figure” in the extremist group’s propaganda apparatus.

Hassan was believed to have been in contact with several jihadi sympathizers linked to foiled lone-wolf plots in Rhode Island, Pennsylvania and New York City, Hughes said. Authorities also say he exchanged tweets with Elton Simpson, one of the two gunmen who were shot dead after opening fire with assault rifles at a cartoon contest in Texas that featured depictions of the prophet Mohammed.

Hassan, who left Minneapolis when he was a senior at Roosevelt High School, previously was thought to have been killed in Mogadishu, according to a 2009 House report.

Ben Petok, spokesman with the U.S. attorney’s office in Minneapolis, on Monday declined to comment on the State Department report.


By Alexia Fernandez Campbell

Humera Khan scours Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr for familiar words. Phrases like: “They are animals” or “it’s us versus them” or “war on Islam.”

Khan is following the Islamic State’s electronic trail. The extremist group’s grooming process usually starts with political messages, then it turns religious, she says. These are ISIS tactics used by recruiters around the world to brainwash young people into embracing radical, violent interpretations of Islam—ones that demonize nonbelievers and victimize Muslims.
“They use hate speech. They increase the anger level. Once you are angry, people seem to think less clearly,” says Khan, a national security strategist with four degrees from MIT.

The Pakistani-American woman works from her Washington office at Muflehnun, a think tank she founded in 2010 to combat violent extremism. First, the work focused mostly on al-Qaida, now it’s all about the Islamic State. In the past year-and-a-half, ISIS has reached American recruits at a faster pace than al-Qaida ever did.

During a Sunday evening address from the Oval Office, President Obama outlined his military plan to defeat ISIS. He also emphasized that Muslim communities are allies in the fight, and encouraged the country not to retaliate against them.

“That does not mean denying the fact that an extremist ideology has spread within some Muslim communities. This is a real problem that Muslims must confront, without excuse,” Obama said. He also called on Muslim-American leaders to speak out against Islamic views that do not promote tolerance and human dignity.

Khan is one of a handful of Muslim-Americans who are working to stop ISIS from recruiting young Americans, not just Muslims. She works mostly online, but also offline, hosting training for imams and community leaders around the country. She shows mosque leaders how to spot youth at risk of being radicalized.

She recently held a workshop for 100 teens in Northern Virginia to teach them the difference between Islamic theology and terrorist ideology. Usually, it is the youth who don’t go to mosque regularly or study the Quran closely who are most likely to be brainwashed, she says.

“If young people knew more about [Islamic] values, they would know when they are being manipulated,” says Khan.

The ISIS reach in Western countries has sparked international concern after recent terrorist attacks in Paris and California. The Pakistani woman who orchestrated the shootings in San Bernardino last week with her husband had pledged support on Facebook to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.
Experts on violent extremism are raising the alarm over the influence of ISIS here in the United States. About 250 Americans have traveled or tried to travel to Syria or Iraq to join ISIS fighters as of November, according to Lorenzo Vidino, director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University.

His staff has spent the past six months combing through FBI court files and monitoring social media to understand the appeal of the terrorist group here in America. One thing they discovered is that Americans who join ISIS come from all backgrounds.

“The diversity is incredible,” Vidino says. “We see Caucasians, Latinos, African-Americans and Jews. It really defies any attempt to create a common profile. It makes it even more difficult to understand their motives.”

People arrested this year in connection to the terrorist group include a white, teenage girl from suburban Denver who recently converted to Islam and a Cuban-American man from Miami.

Though the Islamic State has a much stronger influence in Europe, there are about 900 active investigations against ISIS sympathizers in all 50 American states, according to the George Washington University report. Most of them were “groomed” by ISIS supporters through social media networks such as Twitter and Instagram. And many embraced their radical interpretation of Islam as a way to find belonging and a sense of personal identity.

Federal prosecutors around the country have charged 71 people with ISIS-related activities since March 2014. Charges include attempting to support a known terrorist organization to plotting deadly attacks on U.S. soil. Most of the arrests have happened since January, making 2015 the year with the most terrorism-related arrests since September 2001.

“They are only the tip of the iceberg,” said Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the Program on Extremism.

He recalls following one Midwestern woman on Twitter who recently converted to Islam and was trying to find out more about the religion online. ISIS supporters recognized her naiveté and in a matter of weeks he “saw her fall into their trap.”

“If we have 1,000 people who do adopt this ideology … not all these individuals will take the leap. But how do you know who is all talk and who will do...
something dangerous? Monitoring all these people is very complicated. We cannot arrest our way out of this problem,” Hughes says.

The influence of ISIS in the Western world began escalating rapidly in June 2014, when the group announced it was creating a caliphate in Iraq and Syria. ISIS recruiters began ramping up social-media efforts to encourage people to move to this new Islamic empire that doesn’t recognize borders or nationalities. People who can’t make the trip are encouraged to continue the fight in their own communities.

In their homes, neighborhoods, and mosques, Muslims have started their own outreach to counter the spread of ISIS. Imam Makhdooom Zia leads weekly prayer for hundreds of young Muslims each Friday in Northern Virginia. They meet in a banquet hall in Alexandria as part of his organization, Make Space. The idea is to have a more open and inviting place for Muslim-Americans who feel disconnected from their local mosque. About 300 to 400 people lay their prayer mats each Friday facing Mecca.

Zia keeps a close watch on the social media chatter in his circle of congregants, friends and family. Luckily, he has never had to deal directly with anyone showing signs of radicalization, but he constantly talks to his community about the importance of discussing Islamic theology with children, so they are less susceptible to brainwashing.

“We want to get to them before other people get to them,” Zia says. “This kind of ideology and this twisted understanding of Islam is not what most Muslim-Americans are about. It’s basically a false version of Islam available on the internet. But it constantly keeps us up at night and is a big concern for us.”

**Politico California Playbook:** “Politico California Playbook, presented by Chevron: The Jerry and Arnold Show – Obama on teh California attack – Kamala’s spending spree”, December 7, 2015

By Carla Marinucci

**CALIFORNIA IS TALKING ABOUT** the impacts of the San Bernardino shooting on on culture, on social media and on national politics — starting with the President Obama’s address to the nation last night. From Paris, Gov. Jerry
Brown and former governor Arnold Schwarzenegger — not always on the same side of issues — engaged in a bipartisan buddy show that got big press attention. And the Golden State Warriors at 22-0!! More on that later, but first...

‘FREEDOM IS MORE POWERFUL THAN FEAR’ — via LA Times: President Obama, talking to the nation from the Oval Office tonight, called the deaths of 14 people at the hands of Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife Tashfeen Malik "an act of terrorism designed to kill innocent people." Obama, making just his third Oval Office address, said the married couple "had gone down the dark path of radicalization, embracing a perverted interpretation of Islam." [link]

Link to full transcript and video: [http://nbcnews.to/1lHXWeQ](http://nbcnews.to/1lHXWeQ)

— BIG EXPECTATIONS — Rep. Loretta Sanchez, D-Garden Grove — and a 2016 US Senate candidate: “It’s not enough to just degrade ISIS...I want to hear him say that we will have a decisive defeat of ISIS, that we will use every resource..that he will work hard every day to ensure that Americans are safe…”

— REACTION — Minority Leader Rep. Nancy Pelosi: Statement — “Tonight, President Obama was resolute and strong. The United States will not yield to terror. We will be relentless in strengthening our efforts to protect the American people, defeat terrorism and destroy ISIS.”

— REVIEW of Obama’s address on CA terror: “Missed opportunity,” author and celebrity speech coach Ruth Sherman tells POLITICO. Her take: “One of the president’s main jobs is to give voice to the fears and frustrations of the people…. I do not think he succeeded, which is too bad since he is often very eloquent. He did not sound passionate. It seemed workaday, as if he had 3 things he had to cover, and he did it….not very well written...his eyes were scanning the tele-prompter.”

— “Ultimately, he just didn’t sound like he wanted to be there,” Sherman told POLITICO.

LATEST ON THE CALIFORNIA SHOOTING:

— Scoop by Italian newspaper La Stampa: “Father of San Bernardino killer — hated Israel, fascinated by ISIS.” [link]
— FBI investigating mother of shooter Farook, via Daily Mail: “It’s something that we’re looking at very, very closely,” Attorney General Loretta Lynch tells “Meet the Press” Sunday. [http://dailym.ai/1HPBATf](http://dailym.ai/1HPBATf)

— POST-SAN BERNARDINO, US ENTERING A NEW ERA — via NY Times: “We have moved to an entirely new phase in the global terrorist threat and in our homeland security efforts,” Jeh Johnson, the secretary of Homeland Security, said in an interview ... terrorists have “in effect outsourced attempts to attack our homeland. We’ve seen this not just here but in other places. This requires a whole new approach, in my view.” [http://nyti.ms/1XL5fE0](http://nyti.ms/1XL5fE0)

— From Paris, Gov. Jerry Brown criticizes “back door” of other states, that “wide open” gun laws in Nevada and Arizona are a “gigantic back door through which any terrorist can walk,” while he was noncommittal on efforts to strengthen gun control measures in California. Sacramento Bee’s David Siders report: [http://bit.ly/1YS0ENA](http://bit.ly/1YS0ENA)


— “They met online, built a life in San Bernardino...and silently planned a massacre” — LA Times Special Report on the killers — [http://bit.ly/1NFB0rQ](http://bit.ly/1NFB0rQ)

— “Pakistani cleric who heads Red Mosque denies knowing Malik,’’ by Bloomberg Business: “We absolutely, absolutely without any qualification in absolute terms condemn this,” Musadaq Malik, Sharif’s spokesman, said in an interview in Islamabad. “We have the deepest possible empathy for the people who are suffering right now because it happens to our children every day.” [http://bloom.bg/1XTcXGU](http://bloom.bg/1XTcXGU)


THE NATIONAL RIPPLES:

— Hillary Clinton, Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio on Sunday shows talking California attack... Hillary tells George Stephanopoulos on ABC’s “This Week” — “What we want to do is to make sure we have every tool at our disposal..to do everything we can to dismantle this virtual jihadist network” on the internet.

— Ed Rollins, former CA GOP strategist, tells Fox News — “Gun control alone is not the issue..Republicans want to protect gun rights,
Democrats want to take them away...Guns are freedoms in this country, and you’re not going to take them away, and just talk about that, you’re going to antagonize a lot of people.”

“There are 300 million guns in America. There’s no way you’re going to take the guns back..and probably the biggest Christmas gift of all will be people who want their own guns.”

“A Pattern Emerges” — Link to Matt Wuerker’s POLITICO cartoon: http://politi.co/1RwWXL0

—FODDER for GUN TALK via AP — “Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr. urged students, staff and faculty at his Christian school to get a permit to carry a concealed weapon on campus to counter any copycat attack like the deadly rampage in California just days ago.

“Let’s teach them a lesson if they ever show up here,” Falwell told an estimated 10,000 of the campus community at convocation Friday in Lynchburg. While Falwell’s call to arms was applauded, his remarks also seemed to target Muslims.” http://apne.ws/1XL8tHy

SAN BERNARDINO — What comes next for privacy/Silicon Valley:

—"US can't access NSA phone records in California terror case," by AP's Ted Bridis: "The U.S. government’s ability to review and analyze five years' worth of telephone records for the married couple blamed in the deadly shootings in California lapsed just four days earlier when the [NSA's] controversial mass surveillance program was formally shut down.

"Under a court order, those historical calling records at the NSA are now off-limits to agents running the FBI terrorism investigation even with a warrant. Instead, under the new USA Freedom Act, authorities were able to obtain roughly two years' worth of calling records directly from the phone companies of the married couple blamed in the attack." http://apne.ws/1NaD7zU

—VALLEY TALK: Silicon Valley and social media enters the fight cautiously.. via Reuters — “Facebook, Google and Twitter are stepping up efforts to combat online propaganda and recruiting by Islamic militants, but the Internet companies are doing it quietly to avoid the perception that they are helping the authorities police the Web. ... Worse, if the companies spell out exactly how their screening works, they run the risk that technologically savvy
militants will learn more about how to beat their systems. [http://yhoo.it/1m5x5Kq](http://yhoo.it/1m5x5Kq)

— See the report h/t Mike Allen Playbook: “ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa,” by Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, George Washington University's Program on Extremism (Foreword by Jane Harman): "U.S. authorities speak of some 250 Americans who have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria/Iraq to join the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and 900 active investigations against ISIS sympathizers in all 50 states.” [50-page PDF](http://bit.ly/1Nz2YFx)

EDITORIALS — It took an East Coast paper, the New York Times, to run a Page 1 editorial on the California events — the first such opinion piece in more than a century. [http://nyti.ms/1YSFz5w](http://nyti.ms/1YSFz5w)

—But California papers also had strong voices, example via LATimes: “Enough. This nation’s infatuation with guns — inflamed by the ludicrous stances of the NRA, and abetted by Congress’ fear of that powerful but irresponsible group — is suicidal. There are too many guns, too easily obtained. Often they are in the hands of those who should not have them at all, such as the mentally ill.” [http://lat.ms/1XROPED](http://lat.ms/1XROPED)

—Times Letters’ editor Paul Thornton, in his regular newsletter looking back on Week in Opinion: “Next week, I hope to write a newsletter about something besides mass shootings.”

VOICES FROM THE GALLERY

—Outraged Cowboy Libertarian blogger Patrick Dorinson on NYTimes editorial — “The Left and their media mouthpieces have created a narrative about guns that might sit well in San Francisco, where the city’s last gun store just closed or Hollywood where the celebrities decry gun violence while they cash their paychecks made from movies laced with gun violence.”

—Flashreport.org publisher Jon Fleischman on Facebook: “California law requires each Sheriff (or approving authority) to ask you for a reason that you should be granted a permit to carry a concealed weapon (CCW). They all should accept ‘San Bernardino’ as a valid reason. Period.”

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WHAT’S THE CLIMATE IN PARIS:
—THE JERRY AND ARNOLD SHOW — via LA Times Chris Megerian
— “It was like the debut of an environmentally themed buddy cop drama, with a political odd couple uniting against a common foe. In one chair was California’s governor, Jerry Brown, the cerebral Democrat known for dropping Latin phrases into Capitol press conferences.

“In the other was his predecessor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, the Republican movie star who is fond of finding ways to compare political issues to his championship bodybuilding career.” http://lat.ms/21Hu7vX

—@davidsiders — “It’s like one mind in two bodies” — How @Scharzenegger feels about @JerryBrownGov Link to video: http://bit.ly/1TusqVs

THE LIST GROWS — “Jerry Brown’s MOU Life in Paris,” by Sacramento Bee’s David Siders: On Sunday, Brown signed up eight more jurisdictions to his agreement, bringing the total number of signatories to 80 who “represent more than 614 million people and a combined gross domestic product equivalent to nearly a quarter of the world economy.”

While world leaders try to negotiate a new climate pact, Brown argues that states and other subnational governments can band together to pressure them on the issue from below.


—Statement from Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf, a new signatory, in Paris with Brown and Schwarzenegger: “Oakland proudly supports fellow governments in making and achieving tangible commitments, and to prove that success in meeting these goals is possible.”

—In Paris, NextGen Climate founder Tom Steyer hearts Bernie Sanders on climate change: “Today, Senator Sanders showed clear leadership on climate change by calling for our country to aggressively cut carbon pollution and create millions of good-paying clean energy jobs…..Now that all three Democratic presidential candidates have laid out their climate and clean energy goals, it’s time for a robust debate over the best approach to solve the climate crisis—and for the Republican presidential candidates to finally step up on this issue.”

GOLDEN STATE ELECTIONS GAMES:

OUCH DEPT — “Posh hotels and pricey airfare: Meet the Senate candidates driving Democrats crazy,” by National Journal’s Alex Roarty: “One stay. One hotel. $1,886.

That’s how much Kamala Harris’s campaign spent this March to put up the California Senate candidate at Washington’s luxurious St. Regis hotel….

“It’s not as if the California attorney general had money to burn, either. She’s already spent more than 40 percent of the $6 million she’s raised since becoming a candidate in January, an alarming burn rate for a candidate who is also on her second campaign manager and third finance director.” http://bit.ly/1m6akG9

AHEAD OF THE CURVE — LA Times’ Cathleen Decker’s must-read on Gavin Newsom’s uncanny political instincts — “Newsom’s political image has been built on taking early and controversial positions, as he did with his support for same-sex marriage at a time most Democratic elected officials ran from it, and then seeing events confirm his view…..On Friday, in an early demonstration, he sent out a fundraising pitch blistering Congress for spurning new gun measures in deference to the NRA.”

“Aggressively confronting an enemy like that is, in political terms, not a bad place to be in a Democratic state as the 2018 election nears.” http://lat.ms/1PMyFxa

VALLEYLAND:

DEEP DIVE DEPT — “Commendable, but not philanthropy — yet” — SF Chronicle’s Kath Pender breaks down big Zuckerberg-Chan’s announcement last week: “Over their lifetimes, they will transfer the shares, currently worth $45 billion, into a limited liability company named the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. If Zuckerberg had donated his shares to a 501(c)3 organization — which could be a public charity or private foundation — he could get a tax deduction equal to the current value of the shares, up to a certain percentage of his annual income.
“But unlike a charity or private foundation, the LLC has no obligation to use the money for charitable purposes or make disclosures about its investments, operations or disbursements. ….In the LLC, Zuckerberg can spend the money on charitable or campaign contributions, lobbying, investing in for-profit companies — or anything else.”

http://sfchron.cl/1OaJlub

—AMAZON AMBITIONS GROW, By Re/Code’s Jason Del Rey: “Amazon goes to great lengths to get packages into customers’ hands as quickly as possible — even if it means employing drones. Those efforts will now include putting thousands of Amazon-branded trucks on the road. The announcement comes as Amazon’s North American retail business is growing at its fastest clip in several years. http://on.recode.net/1m5iX3y

—EXODUS — Carly Fiorina, Neel Kashkari, Chuck Quackenbush, Chuck DeVore, the list grows: “GOP candidates fleering California,” by SFChron’s John Wildermuth: http://sfchron.cl/1RwXRHq

THE HAVE S AND HAVE NOTS:

BARGAIN BASEMENT — “$600 a month to live in a Fed-Ex truck? Only in San Francisco,” by SFChron’s Lizzie Johnson: “For $600 each month, one lucky occupant can get wood floors, a sunroof, a fold-out couch, a mini kitchen and a space that triples as a car, storage unit and home all in one. Disclaimer: It doesn’t include running water — as in a bathroom — and the parking tickets might start to pile up if it isn’t moved nightly. http://sfchron.cl/1Nyk9Hb

—“I cover the asses of the masses” — that’s what the Bay Area clothing maven George Zimmer, former chief executive of the Men’s Wearhouse, once told me was his business secret. The latest via LA Times: Zimmer “has listed his oceanfront estate on the Big Island of Hawaii for sale at $35 million. … The 7.45-acre Kohala Coast property has “more than 1,000 feet of ocean frontage,” a 10,000-square-foot main house with seven bedrooms, seven full bathrooms and two powder rooms, a media room, a billiard room with a wet bar and an exercise room that open to an oceanfront swimming pool and spa..”

Link to photo tour: http://lat.ms/1ljzAIM
GARCETTI’S HOUSE FOR SALE — Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti’s Echo Park home on the market for $1.65 million via LA Times “Hot Properties”: “Designed by Daniel L. Dworsky and since renovated by Scrafano Architects, the 1953 post-and-beam sits on about half an acre and has views of the city, canyon and surrounding valley.”

Link to photo tour of Garcetti’s home: http://lat.ms/1m4yctL

HOLLYWOODLAND:

— Awards Season update via The Hollywood Reporter: “Spotlight,” Tom McCarthy’s drama about the Boston Globe reporters who exposed sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, was named best picture of the year by the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, edging out George Miller’s Mad Max: Fury Road, which was runner-up in the top category. Spotlight, which was written by Josh Singer and McCarthy, also earned the award for best screenplay.”


TRENDWATCH:

HASTA LA GLORIA — “Low-Riding Culture Gone Global” — via NYTimes: “In the Southern California lowrider scene, there are some clashes as to which country has adopted the Mexican-American culture with the most swag. … Today lowriding has an active presence in American culture — and having something of a moment. A film called “Low Riders” starring Eva Longoria, adorned with a bandanna and gold-hoop earrings, is now in preproduction.

http://nyti.ms/1N53ucF

— BIG DADDY — What Mark Zuckerberg’s paternity leave could change: New York Times’ Claire Cain Miller looks at the impact of Mark Zuckerberg’s paternity leave and policy in California — “one of three states that offer leave for both parents”… “The results of California’s program — the first to offer government-supported paternity leave in the United States — show how policies can help families adapt to the fact that most parents now work, and men report as much stress over work-family balance as women do.” http://nyti.ms/1IGKube

DROUGHT DIVIDE — “Democrats criticize GOP attempt to insert drought plan in federal spending bill,” by LATimes’ Sarah D. Wire
and Noah Bierman: “California Democrats are fuming over an attempt by the state’s Republican House members to insert language addressing the state’s drought into a must-pass bill to fund the federal government. ...Congress has until next Friday to pass it and avoid shutting down the government.”
http://lat.ms/1XL7wzd

—“Tales from Tehrangles” — Los Angeles is home to largest Iranian diaspora in the world” by Javad Parsa in the New York Times: “I believe the state is a popular destination for Iranians because the constant traffic jams, warm climate and rugged, mountainous terrain remind us of home. Along Westwood Boulevard, hub of the local Iranian community, almost all the signs hanging above the shops are in Persian. I felt as if I was strolling again on one of Tehran’s main streets, which I have longed to do ever since I left.”
http://nyti.ms/1NyjdCv

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MEDIAWORLD:
ELSEWHERE IN PARADISE:

—Officer who beat woman will not be charged, via Gawker: The Los Angeles County DA’s office announced Friday “that it would not be pressing charges against highway patrol officer officer Daniel Andrew,’’ filmed throwing a 51-year-old African-American woman, Marlene Pinnock, to the ground and repeatedly punching her in July 2014.

Link to video of incident: https://youtu.be/eciO9EfktRQ

WHATTA DEAL — State retirement system bidding nearly $2 billion for Manhattan skyscraper, via Bloomberg Business: “California Public Employees’ Retirement System and RXR Realty LLC are in talks to each acquire a midtown Manhattan skyscraper from AXA Financial in deals that would total about $3.6 billion, according to a person with knowledge of the discussions. http://bloom.bg/1lGqp4I

....#Bridgegate Chapter 235 — THE CHORUS GROWS: New crop of expert bridge engineers lambaste transportation chief on Bay
Bridge serious construction problems, via SF Chronicle op-ed: “Informed, qualified engineers with decades of bridge building experience... have serious concerns about the most expensive bridge project in California history ($6.4 billion-plus, 400 percent over budget) and one that carries some 280,000 vehicles a day.” http://sfchron.cl/1XTfxwI

— DUB NATION RULES via SF Chronicle: “The Golden State Warriors, reveling in their record-breaking 21-0 start and fresh off an NBA championship in June, clearly are basketball’s top team on the court. But by nearly any other measure — from ticket and merchandise sales to social-media buzz — they also have become the game’s most popular and high-profile attraction.” http://sfchron.cl/1ly74xl


MUST READ — Loyola Law School’s Jessica Levinson breaks down impending court ruling on CA redistricting: “If the high court rules that states are required to draw district lines based on the number of voters, not the number of people, it would have significant implications for who gains and loses political power....if the arguments by the plaintiffs carry the day, there will be more Republican districts and power will shift, rather dramatically in many cases, toward rural and Republican voters. If the plaintiffs win, Republicans win.” http://bit.ly/1LWK8Cu

— President’s Obama message on the first night of Hanukkah, which began Sunday at sundown: “During these eight days, let us be inspired by the light that can overcome darkness. As we recall the Maccabees’ struggle to free a people from oppression, let us re dedicate ourselves to being the engine of the miracles we seek.”

—Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg writes: "My children and I just lit the candles that mark the beginning of Hanukkah, the festival of lights... After such a difficult year, including the violent events in California last week, it sometimes feels like we are surrounded by darkness. This Hanukkah, let us all try to
remember the triumph of light, and that there can be unexpected miracles in the hardest times." Link to her Facebook

WHERE’S MARCO?

—Florida Senator Marco Rubio in Bay Area for two fundraisers: in Mt. View at Mozart Automobile Foundation Museum 5 p.m. tickets $1000-2700 per person; 7 p.m. fundraiser in SF at home of Nick Schrock.

Think Progress: “What We Know About The 300 ISIS Sympathizers In The U.S.”, December 7, 2015

By Beenish Ahmed

There is a “small but active cadre of individuals infatuated with ISIS’ ideology” in the U.S. according to a new report from the Program on Extremism at the George Washington University. Interest in ISIS’ influence in America exploded last week when a married couple attacked on a social services building in San Bernardino, Calif. and killed 14 people. The George Washington study reviewed all ISIS sympathizers, not just those prepared to launch attacks to further its mission.

The group of people who support ISIS is surprisingly diverse, according to Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, the report’s authors. It ranges from Shannon Conley, a certified nurse and U.S. Army Explorer who said she wanted to become a “housewife and camp nurse” to ISIS militants in Syria to Mohammad Oda Dakhlla, the son of an imam and a Mississippi State University graduate student.

Here’s a breakdown of ISIS’ presence in America, not inclusive of the San Bernardino case. All information that is not otherwise attributed is from the Program on Extremism report.

About 300

The number of ISIS sympathizers who are either American or based in the U.S. as identified by the Program on Extremism.
The number of active investigations pending against suspected ISIS-inspired operations and other forms of so-called “home-grown terrorism” in October, according to a speech by FBI Director James Comey.

The number of Americans believed to have traveled to Syria or Iraq to join the Islamic State as July 2015, according to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Last year, an average of nine Americans a month tried to travel to ISIS-territory, both successfully and unsuccessfully. According to counterterrorism officials said that figure has dropped to two a month since July. The shift though could indicate that law enforcement efforts are more effective at stopping ISIS sympathizers from getting to Iraq and Syria, or that more would-be ISIS fighters are heeding the group’s call to commit acts of terrorism in the West.

The number of Americans who have been charged with crimes related to ISIS since March 2014. According to the Vidino and Hughes, these indictments are just “the tip of the iceberg” when it comes to the number of people believed to be linked to the group in the U.S.

Of the 71 people charged with ISIS-related crimes, 58 were U.S. citizens and 6 were legal, permanent residents, which points to the “homegrown nature of the threat,” according to researchers.

The age range of people who have been arrested in the U.S. for ISIS-related activities.

Nearly half of those who have been arrested for ISIS-related activities are converts to Islam. That’s disproportionately high given that only about 25 percent American Muslims are converts.

By Chris Hannas and Mary Alice Salinas

Two mass killings, one in Paris and the other in California, have focused U.S. leaders' attention on two methods by which people are allowed into the country, as they look for ways to prevent a future attack.

One target for reform is the K-1 visa used by Tashfeen Malik and more than 25,000 people a year who are engaged to U.S. citizens to move to the country. Malik died in a shootout with police Wednesday after she and her husband killed 14 people hours earlier at a holiday party.

The other, the visa waiver program, affects a pool of people that is orders of magnitude larger. It allows people from one of 38 different countries to travel to the United States for tourism or business. They can stay up to 90 days.

"We should put in place stronger screening for those who come into America without a visa so that we can take a hard look at whether they've traveled to war zones," President Barack Obama said in an address on terrorism Sunday. "And we're working with members of both parties in Congress to do exactly that."

In 2013, the latest year of comprehensive federal data, 21.2 million people entered the U.S. under the visa waiver program, accounting for about 39 percent of all people who came for a vacation or business trip.

Congress to vote

The House of Representatives will vote this week on a bill to tighten the program. The measure would bar citizens or nationals of the waiver countries from coming to the U.S. without a visa if, in the past five years, they have been to Iraq, Syria or any other designated "country or area of concern."

Any of the waiver countries could be suspended from participating if they fail to cooperate with the U.S. in sharing information about whether travelers represent a security threat.
Obama also said Sunday he has ordered the departments of State and Homeland Security to review K-1 visa regulations. A K-1, or fiancé, visa is easier to obtain than others, raising questions about the process and how potentially porous it is.

Malik grew up in Pakistan but later moved to Saudi Arabia, where she first met Syed Farook in person. The two had previously corresponded through an online dating service, according to Farook family attorney Mohammad Abuershaid.

Ease of entry

That one meeting was all it took for the pair to qualify as an engaged couple for the K-1: one meeting within two years of the visa application. Farook would have collected evidence of that meeting and filed a petition requesting a K-1 with the U.S. Immigration Service, the beginning of a process that generally takes six to 12 months and includes medical, background and income checks.

David North with the Center for Immigration Studies, a Washington-based research organization that leans toward restricting immigration, wrote last week that applicants for K-1 visas are seldom denied entry to the U.S. Last year, 304 of the visas were granted for every one denied, he said.

With Malik's case fresh in the minds of lawmakers looking to add restrictions, North said this is the first time someone admitted to the U.S. on that type of visa has ever been accused of murder.

"To the best of my knowledge, we have had aliens from the Middle East killing people in the United States, or trying to do so, on tourist, student and immigrant visas, but this is the first one to be in the K-1 class," said North.

The shooting "certainly means that someone has to consider it and think about it," said Thomas Sanderson, the director of transnational threats at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies about tightening the K-1 process. "It’s a tough question similar to the visa waiver program, which I personally think is the much bigger security threat here."

Questions about the fiancé visa program come as a heated debated continues in the U.S. about the Obama administration’s plan to resettle Syrian refugees. Some critics argue the refugees pose a greater security risk because terrorists may use the resettlement program to enter the country.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest pointed out Friday that the vetting program for Syrians requires “the most rigorous, intensive screening of anyone
who attempts to enter the United States," while the screening standards for the fiancé visa "are not as strict."

Associated Press: “San Bernardino terror attack shows difficulty ID’ing terrorists”, December 8, 2015

By Eric Tucker and Brian Melley

LOS ANGELES (AP) — By the time the married couple who carried out the deadly San Bernardino attack came to the attention of police, it was far too late.

Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, had gone undetected while planning the massacre that included amassing thousands of rounds of ammunition, high-powered guns and pipe bombs.

The FBI’s acknowledgement that the San Bernardino shooters had been radicalized Muslims for "quite some time" points to the difficulty discovering potential terrorists who keep a very low profile and shows the deadly consequences that can occur when identification comes too late.

"It appears these people were very good at hiding their intentions," said David Schanzer, a Duke University public policy professor who runs a center that studies terrorism. "What this situation shows is it’s not a fool-proof system. ... A hundred percent prevention is not achievable."

The couple, who lived quietly in a two-bedroom townhouse with their 6-month-old daughter and Farook’s mother, had not come to the attention of law enforcement before clothing themselves in black, donning face masks and bursting into an annual festive meeting of Farook’s county health department colleagues with guns blazing. They killed 14 people and wounded 21 last Wednesday before dying in a shootout with police about four hours later.

David Bowdich, chief of the FBI’s Los Angeles office, told reporters the agency was searching for how and where radicalization occurred and who might have led them to those beliefs.
Investigators believe Malik radicalized before meeting Farook, FBI spokeswoman Laura Eimiller said Tuesday, though she didn’t elaborate on what led the FBI to that conclusion. Farook, 28, a restaurant inspector born in the U.S. to a Pakistani family, radicalized before Malik, 29, emigrated to the U.S. from Pakistan in July 2014 on a fiancée visa and married him the next month.

America’s counterterrorism infrastructure has had success flagging individuals who try to travel abroad to fight alongside militants, fund operations overseas or who communicate online with overseas terrorists. But it’s been far more challenging for law enforcement to identify each and every individual who self-radicalizes online, a process the Islamic State has facilitated with slick Internet propaganda aimed at the disaffected.

"They’re not communicating with a terrorist organization, they’re not doing those other things that we have typically looked for when we’re looking for terrorists," said John Cohen, a former Homeland Security Department counterterrorism coordinator.

Behavior in isolation isn’t likely to put a defendant on law enforcement’s radar. But sudden withdrawal from friends or family, for instance, starts hitting trip wires when combined with other actions, such as increased visits to hate-spewing chat rooms or radical change in appearance. Even then, law enforcement is challenged on a daily basis in separating individuals who hold radical views, which in and of itself is not a crime, from those who are plotting acts of violence or encouraging others in that direction.

"It’s a highly individualized process, and each person is different," said Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University’s Center for Cyber & Homeland Security, which recently issued a study showing that 56 people had been charged in the U.S. this year in connection with supporting the Islamic State. "The radicalization process could take a few years, it could take a few months."

Mike German, a national security fellow at New York University Law School and a former FBI agent, said the government’s model to predict who will become a terrorist is flawed, partly because it focuses too much on those who adhere to a radical or extreme ideology.

"Certainly some of the people who become terrorists have expressed extreme thoughts before, but it’s a not a causal factor," German said. "There are many times more people holding radical beliefs who never engage in violent activity."
The Obama administration, mindful of the problem, has created an initiative called Countering Violent Extremism that encourages communities to steer vulnerable young adults away from radicalization, though it’s unclear how successful that effort is.

FBI agents currently have hundreds of open inquiries in all 50 states related to terrorist ideology. When they identify someone they think is predisposed to violence, they’ve turned to a range of techniques — including sting operations involving informants and inoperable weapons and placing undercover agents in chat rooms — as part of their investigation.

They’re nonetheless constrained under Justice Department regulations in the investigative steps they may take. That guidance, known as the Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide, permits agents to check out a citizen’s suspicion even when there’s minimal factual basis for doing so.

Actually opening a full-blown investigation, and using tools such as surveillance and phone wiretaps, requires a significantly higher burden of evidence of wrongdoing.

"For law enforcement to take action, their investigation has to reveal that a person has gone beyond simply having extreme thoughts, and is actually moving in the direction of carrying out an act of violence," Cohen said. "They have to be in the process of committing a crime."

So far, the FBI has revealed little of what it's learned about Farook and Malik and their planning, except for details about the weaponry they had, materials they had to make more pipe bombs and that both had been taking target practice. Malik also practiced at Riverside Magnum Range, where Farook shot at targets two days before the attack, Eimiller said.

Investigators also are trying to determine a money trail for funding of the operation. A U.S. official said Tuesday authorities are looking into a deposit made to Farook's bank account prior to the shooting. The official, who had been briefed on the investigation but was not authorized to discuss it by name and spoke on condition of anonymity, would not further characterize the nature of the deposit or what was suspicious about it.

Hughes said the FBI surely is looking to see what red flags law enforcement might have been missed — part of a post-mortem analysis that follows every incident of this nature.
"What do you learn from this, and how do you mitigate the next attack?" he asked.


By Kathy Gilsinan

Nearly a week after the attacks in San Bernardino, the picture of the attackers and what drove them remains murky. The husband-and-wife team of Syed Rizwan Farook, an American citizen, and Tashfeen Malik, a permanent resident who FBI officials said pledged loyalty to the Islamic State on Facebook shortly before the shootings, were both killed fleeing the scene and are now the subject of an evolving investigation into the impetus for their radical act. At a news conference on Monday, David Bowdich, the assistant director of the FBI’s Los Angeles office, told reporters that the pair had been “radicalized” for “quite some time” but “the question for us is how and by whom and where were they radicalized? Maybe there’s not a ‘by whom.’ Remember, oftentimes it’s on the Internet. We just don’t know.”

The FBI has not found evidence so far of an internationally coordinated plot, which raises the specter of homegrown jihadist terrorism—a category that President Obama, in his address to the nation on Sunday, pointed to as part of a “new phase” in the terrorist threat, one that preoccupied policymakers for years before the rise of ISIS. For example, the 2009 shooting in Fort Hood, Texas—until last week the deadliest jihadist attack on American soil since 9/11—was perpetrated by the Army psychiatrist Nidal Malik Hasan, who had tried multiple times to communicate via the Internet with Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born imam and al-Qaeda leader later killed by a U.S. drone strike in Yemen. But it’s not clear Awlaki knew who Hasan was until after the shooting, which he praised on his website. In other words, rather than being actively groomed by al-Qaeda, Hasan may have been "self-radicalized," seeking out ideological inspiration himself as opposed to being a passive recipient of extremist propaganda.

In the wake of that attack, Dennis Blair, then the U.S. government’s director of national intelligence, told a Senate committee that “we have made the complex,
multiple-team attacks very difficult to pull off.” But “identifying individual terrorists ... using simple attack methods is a new degree of difficulty.” Obama echoed this theme on Sunday, remarking that “as we’ve become better at preventing complex, multifaceted attacks like 9/11, terrorists turned to less complicated acts of violence like the mass shootings that are all too common in our society.” It’s hard to organize a conspiracy involving communication and coordination among multiple people without getting caught, particularly if some of those people are overseas. It’s almost impossible to get precursor chemicals for sophisticated explosives. But it’s easy to plot in your own home, with your spouse, brother, or no one; and it’s easy to get a gun.

These dynamics have held steady in the United States for years. The urgent question now is whether ISIS, and in particular its much-touted mastery of social media, has appreciably changed the homegrown threat through some kind of superior ability to radicalize followers wherever they are based in the world. (The group does exhort Western supporters to travel to its self-proclaimed caliphate, but according to a recent study of ISIS sympathizers in the West, no one returning from such a journey has yet committed violence in the United States.)

But the causal relationship between individual radicalization and consumption of jihadist propaganda on the Internet is not straightforward. The process by which a person grows radical involves a complex mix of variables; in many cases, an individual may become more extremist offline, for example through the influence of friends or relatives, and then find ISIS online by virtue of its being the most accessible jihadist community to join. Or these processes could happen simultaneously.

In Obama’s words, “the Internet erases the distance between countries,” and “we see growing efforts by terrorists to poison the minds of people like the Boston Marathon bombers and the San Bernardino killers.” Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who has been sentenced to death for his role in the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, had al-Qaeda material on his laptop, including a bomb-making recipe from the Yemen affiliate’s English-language magazine Inspire, but pledged allegiance to no particular group in his claim of responsibility for the attack. That bombing took place before ISIS grabbed global attention in the summer of 2014, and certainly the rise of that group offers a new banner for “homegrown” extremists to claim. But as Joshua Keating has pointed out, it’s not clear how much jihadist radicals based in the West care about the difference between al-Qaeda and ISIS.
In a 2011 paper reviewing 10 years’ worth of terrorism prosecutions in the United States since 9/11, the bulk of them involving U.S. citizens, Karen Greenberg and her colleagues at New York University’s Center on Law and Security found that the top group affiliations among those indicted were “No Known Affiliation” (231 defendants); al-Qaeda (102 defendants); Hezbollah (72 defendants); and al-Shabaab (37 defendants). The crimes of which they were accused ranged, she and her coauthors wrote, “from misuse of a passport to attempt to use a weapon of mass destruction,” with only a handful of serious plots among them and criminal-conspiracy or material-support cases constituting the majority of the charges. (Since these numbers count prosecutions, many of them stemming from FBI sting operations, they are a reflection less of trends in terrorist activity than of law-enforcement priorities.)

More recent research suggests that the ISIS brand is on the ascent among aspiring and active American jihadists, though the methodology behind the numbers differs from that used in the Greenberg study. Since March 2014, according to a new report from George Washington University’s Program on Extremism, 71 people have been “arrested, indicted, or convicted” for what the authors call “ISIS-related activities” in the United States. Again, these people are predominantly U.S. citizens. And once again, “the overwhelming majority of those charged (73%) were not involved in plotting terrorist attacks in the U.S. Most U.S.-based ISIS supporters were arrested for intent to do harm overseas or for providing material support—namely personnel and funds—to fighters in Syria and Iraq.”

Another pattern revealed by previous research may yet hold true in the ISIS era. Reviewing al-Qaeda’s Internet-recruitment efforts in a 2011 paper, Brian Michael Jenkins of the Rand Corporation wrote that “many of the terrorists identified in this paper began their journey on the Internet. However, al-Qaeda has not yet managed to inspire many of its online followers to action. In the United States, its virtual army, with a few exceptions, has remained virtual.”

So what has changed? The content of the message and the venue where it’s delivered, primarily.

“Self-radicalization is not new, and in fact represents the norm that we have dealt with,” Jenkins told me. “What is new is that the very effective use of social
media by ISIL, ISIS, whatever you choose to call it, has enabled them to reach a larger audience, a younger audience,” due in part to the “content of the communications, the vehicle of the communications.” To wit: The crowd attracted to the kind of brutality porn for which ISIS is famous is a very particular, self-selecting one. And Twitter, where according to the GW report “American ISIS sympathizers are particularly active,” may reach a younger audience.

Still, Charlie Winter, a senior research associate at the Transcultural Conflict and Violence Initiative at Georgia State University, said radicalization does not occur “in a bubble”—passive consumption of propaganda is not enough to transform an ordinary person into a murderer. It’s not the case, he said, “that individuals can find themselves on inevitable trajectories toward extremism if they go to the right place on the Internet and start hanging out with the wrong crowd. It’s nowhere near as simple as that.”

Online and off, before ISIS and since, the process has a lot to do with relationships, and ISIS’s social-media savvy can obscure the continuing importance of real-world connections in the radicalization process. Europe, for example, is a far more fertile recruiting ground for ISIS than the U.S. is, in part due to the stronger presence of in-person extremist networks there. “I think certainly in terms of logistics, there’s a kind of different recruitment landscape ... in North America than in Europe,” Winter said, “but I think that regardless of whether they’re operating online or offline, these networks act in a similar way and they’re offering similar things,” such as a sense of belonging or commitment to a cause.

To the extent that incitement to terrorism is a numbers game—even if the rate of translating such efforts into attacks is small, the number of successful attacks goes up with the number of attempts to incite them—ISIS’s command of Twitter does allow it to spread a wide net. And it’s almost certainly easier today for someone who, like the San Bernardino killers, has been “radicalized for quite some time” to find supportive material and inspiration online.

“That’s kind of a basic marketing theory,” Jenkins said. “But although this sounds perverse in the wake of the tragedy in San Bernardino, neither al-Qaeda nor the Islamic State, in response to their continuing exhortations to followers to take action, neither one of them is selling a lot of cars. As a marketing campaign, the yield is very, very low.” But that’s the nature of terrorism: Low-yield efforts can have a very high impact.
The Hill: “Eyes on ISIS”, December 8, 2015

By Julian Hattem

Lorenzo Vidino knows violent radicals — personally. The 38-year-old Italian academic has “longstanding” relationships with some jihadists, he said, as part of his 15 years in the study of radicalization and violent Islamism in the West.

“I think it’s crucially important,” he said in an interview with The Hill last week, which took place in his office on George Washington University’s (GWU) campus overlooking Pennsylvania Avenue. “How do you study a certain phenomenon if you don’t talk to the people inside it, whether they are former or whether they are still radicals?

“I think it’s the right thing to do. It gives you good perspective.”

In June, Vidino opened the doors to GWU’s program on extremism, a new project that he hopes will help fill in some of the gaps about understanding why people radicalize and decide to follow a violent ideology — be it radical Islam, right-wing movements or anything else.

“To put in from a market point of view, supply and demand, there’s a lot of demand for [a program on extremism] — whether it’s government interested in having academic research done on it, whether it’s the media — there’s a lot of demand, not a lot of supply,” Vidino said in his accented baritone.

Of late, there’s been particular interest in the work of jihadist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), following last month’s deadly terror attack in Paris, which killed 130 people.

More recently, last week’s terror attack in San Bernardino, Calif. — which may have been inspired by ISIS, if not directed by the group — has only further raised the alarm about the group’s ability to trigger attacks far beyond the borders of its self-proclaimed caliphate in the Middle East.

The couple allegedly responsible for killing 14 people and injuring 21 “had gone down the dark path of radicalization, embracing a perverted interpretation of Islam that calls for war against America and the West,” President Obama said in a rare address from the Oval Office on Sunday evening.
“As groups like ISIL grew stronger amidst the chaos of war in Iraq and then Syria — and as the Internet erases the distance between countries — we see growing efforts by terrorists to poison the minds of people like the Boston Marathon bombers and the San Bernardino killers,” Obama added, using an alternative acronym for ISIS.

There are “a million different reasons” why someone might one day snap and decide to take up arms against innocent people, Vidino said. “It’s a very complex and individualized process — you don’t have one cookie-cutter model.”

“To be a full expert on radicalism, one should have PhDs in psychology, sociology, theology, security studies, international relations, whatever,” he added.

“But I think, really, it’s psychology that’s extremely important,” he maintained, since the decision, often times, is so personal.

Even if the precise formula for radicalism remains unknown, certain patterns are becoming clear, he said.

Last week, Vidino’s program released an analysis of the 71 people indicted on charges related to ISIS. The report found “unprecedented” support for jihadism in the U.S. right now, compared to any time since Sept. 11, 2001.

In part, that spike has been aided by the Internet and social media streams that have allowed people from all over the globe to communicate directly with — and be indoctrinated by — radicals half a world away.

Law enforcement officials have also been quick to blame the proliferation of encryption technology in the years since government whistleblower Edward Snowden’s leaks, which have blocked their ability to peer into communications sent by jihadist recruiters to susceptible targets in the West.

Radical Islamism dominates most of the headlines about extremism, but Vidino insists that his program is not limited to adherents of ISIS, al Qaeda or similar groups.

“One of the things we’re trying to do is see the similarities in the radicalization process of people that become extremists on any kind of extremist ideology,” he said. “So the jihadist, the right wing.”

According to data compiled by the New America Foundation, more Americans have been killed by right-wing extremists — including white nationalists and...
followers of “sovereign citizen” movements who reject government control — than by Islamic extremists in the years since 9/11.

In many ways, xenophobic extremists and Islamic radicals help spur each other’s narratives, Vidino claimed.

“The extreme right, stoking fears about Muslims and so on, that creates, obviously, a chilling effect and a polarizing effect and a radicalizing effect on parts of the Muslim community,” he said. “And parts of the Muslim community being radical, that [is] being used by the right.”

“They’re the best allies,” Vidino added. “It’s a mutually reinforcing process.”

Vidino has traveled back and forth between the U.S. and Europe since he developed an interest in radical Islamism 15 years ago.

His hometown of Milan was “an interesting hub” of radicalism before 9/11, Vidino said, when hundreds of foreign Muslim fighters traveled to Bosnia following the breakup of Yugoslavia.

“Twenty years ago, if you wanted to go to Bosnia to be a foreign fighter, you went through a mosque in Milan,” he said. “The guy who was the emir of the foreign fighters in Bosnia was the imam of the mosque in my neighborhood in Milan.”

Vidino’s office at GWU reflects the transatlantic split, with alternating pictures of Milan’s famous Duomo and classic Americana.

That perspective has helped his work, he says. While the U.S. has devoted extensive resources to stopping terrorism since 9/11, some strategies are less evolved than their European counterparts.

The technique of countering violent extremism — which aims to nip radical tendencies in the bud, before people turn to violence — has been widely employed in the United Kingdom and other countries for nearly a decade. In the U.S., however, it’s only now becoming a focus of the federal government.

“Here, compared to the U.K., it’s seven, eight years behind the U.K.,” Vidino said. “Not because the Brits are smarter, they just started it earlier.

“Let’s learn from the British experience: the good, the bad.”

Some human-rights advocates worry that foreign efforts to stop radicalism have turned all Muslims into targets of government monitoring.
Vidino’s program is interested in exploring successful strategies, he said, along with continued work on right-wing extremism and constant investigation of ISIS followers in the U.S. His program is also working on an effort to compile narratives from former extremists of all types to understand the similarities in their stories.

“We just started,” Vidino said. “Everything we’ve been doing so far has been well received, but we really just started. And we’re small.

“The idea is to, ideally, grow.”

The Hill: “Overnight Cybersecurity: Negotiators nearing deal on cyber sharing bill”, December 8, 2015

By Cory Bennett and Katie Bo Williams

THE BIG STORIES:
--CLOSE TO ME: Congress's top intelligence leaders insisted on Tuesday that a final deal is imminent on the text of major cybersecurity legislation. "I think we’re very close," Rep. Adam Schiff (Calif.), the House Intelligence Committee’s top Democrat, told The Hill. "We’re hoping to close in on a final product imminently." Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), ranking member on the Senate Intelligence Committee, agreed. "I think it’s about done," she said. Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Burr (R-N.C.) acknowledged there were "some issues or differences," but maintained, "we’re working through them pretty methodically." The hopefulness comes after several days of intense wrangling between the two Intelligence committees and the House Homeland Security Committee that some thought might kick the cyber bill talks into next year. Negotiators are scrambling to merge bills from all three committees that aim to encourage businesses to share more data on hackers with the government. The goal is to have a bill on President Obama’s desk by the end of the year, but lawmakers are increasingly under a time crunch and still haven’t reached a deal on the final text’s privacy language. Outsiders tracking the discussions believe Homeland Security Committee Chairman Michael McCaul (R-Texas) -- who cosponsored his committee’s bill favored by privacy advocates -- could derail the talks by going public with his displeasure. But many have heard
he is under considerable pressure from House leadership to negotiate quietly and accept the deal. "I am continuing to work with other congressional leaders in this fluid process to produce the best possible legislation on information sharing," McCaul said in a Tuesday statement. "I am pleased that we are making progress on many aspects of the bill, particularly with regard to privacy and civil liberties protections." To read more about the state of negotiations, click here. To read more about what’s keeping the two sides apart, click here.

--I DO NOT THINK IT MEANS WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS: Opponents to a new bill that would require social media companies to police their networks for terrorist activity began pushing back on the legislation as soon as it was introduced on Tuesday. "I’m opposed to this proposal because I believe it will undermine that collaboration and lead to less reporting of terrorist activity, not more," Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) said in a statement. The bill, introduced by Sens. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Richard Burr (R-N.C.), would require social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to alert federal officials about online terrorist activity. "We’re in a new age where terrorist groups like ISIL are using social media to reinvent how they recruit and plot attacks," Feinstein said, using an alternative acronym for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). "That information can be the key to identifying and stopping terrorist recruitment or a terrorist attack, but we need help from technology companies. Wyden, an outspoken opponent of another major cybersecurity bill co-sponsored by Burr and Feinstein throughout the year, criticized the legislation as counterproductive. This bill, he said, "would create a perverse incentive for companies to avoid looking for terrorist content on their own networks, because if they saw something and failed to report it they would be breaking the law, but if they stuck their heads in the sand and avoided looking for terrorist content they would be absolved of responsibility." To read our full piece, click here.

--INTERNET TROLLS: The hacker group Anonymous is planning a day of trolling as part of its ongoing cyber war against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). One of the teams orchestrating the digital crusade, known as "OpISIS," is encouraging people to take to the Internet on Dec. 11 and bombard ISIS-affiliated social media accounts with mocking photos and tweets. "Post photos of goats while @ing Isis members with captions talking about their wives," OpISIS encouraged in an instructional post on text-sharing site Ghostbin. On particular meme that has already been widely shared by a number of Anonymous-affiliated Twitter accounts are pictures of ISIS fighters photoshopped with rubber ducky heads and holding bathroom scrubbers. The
loosely affiliated hacking collective is also planning a physical component to its day of trolling. In nine cities across North America and Europe, Anonymous has scheduled hours-long rallies where people will bring printed out photos and stickers mocking ISIS, as well as pages "showing how Isis does not represent Islam." In the U.S., there are late afternoon rallies planned in New York, Los Angeles and Seattle. To read our full piece, click here.

DARKER CLICK:
--EVEN THE ONION IS IN ON IT. From the satire site: "Al-Qaeda Member Wistfully Recalls Time When Radicalization Done Face-To-Face Rather Than Online."
Read on, here.

A REPORT IN FOCUS:
--THROWBACK TUESDAY. Experts are divided over the wisdom of booting terrorists off social media networks.

Many cite freedom of speech concerns. Other skeptics suggest that terrorist chatter on social media is a valuable stream of intelligence.
Practically speaking, the sheer scope of ISIS supporters using social media makes monitoring networks a substantial task.

A March study from the Brookings Institute estimated that from September through December 2014, at least 46,000 Twitter accounts were used by ISIS supporters, although not all of them were active at the same time.
ISIS-supporting accounts had an average of about 1,000 followers each -- much higher than the average Twitter user.

A December report from George Washington University's Program on Extremism identified around 300 U.S.-based ISIS supporters who actively spread propaganda and communicate with others on social media.

To read the GWU report, click here.
To read the Brookings Institute report, click here.

A FEATURE READ:
--THE ELUSIVE CHANTEUSE. Many media outlets have tried to track down the creator of bitcoin, but none has conclusively succeeded. Well, now Wired is taking another stab:

"The signs point to Craig Steven Wright, a man who never even made it onto any ... hunters' public list of candidates, yet fits the cryptocurrency creator's profile in nearly every detail. And despite a massive trove of evidence, we still can't say with absolute certainty that the mystery is solved. But two possibilities outweigh all others: Either Wright invented bitcoin, or he's a brilliant hoaxer who very badly wants us to believe he did."

Read on, here.

WHO'S IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

--TRUMP (AGAIN). Republican presidential frontrunner said Monday that he wants to talk to Bill Gates about "closing the Internet up in some way" to prevent ISIS from recruiting young, "impressionable" American kids.

"Somebody will say, 'oh, freedom of speech, freedom of speech,'" Trump said at a rally in South Carolina. "These are foolish people. We've got to maybe do something with the Internet because they are recruiting by the thousands."

Read on, here.

A LOOK AHEAD:

WEDNESDAY

--The Senate Judiciary Committee will hold a hearing on FBI oversight at 10 a.m.
--The Atlantic Council will host a panel discussing trending threats going into the new year at 4 p.m.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT:

Links from our blog, The Hill, and around the Web.

A former software engineer for IBM Corp. in China has been arrested by U.S. authorities for allegedly stealing proprietary source code from his former employer. (Reuters)
China's Huawei Technologies aims to become the world's third-largest data storage provider by 2018 as it targets European and local institutions. (Reuters)

Hacker Toymaker VTech has yet to put a price on the hack that exposed data on 6 million children. (Wall Street Journal)

China has brought to an end Japan's dominance of Asia's high-technology exports, according to the Asian Development Bank. (Bloomberg)

CenturyLink has won a multi-year contract worth up to $10.8 million to fill gaps in a government-wide firewall, according to the Department of Homeland Security. (NextGov)

The Nation: “Why Do We Pretend ISIS Is Crazy?”, December 8, 2015

By Iran Chernus

Oh, no! Not another American war against evil!

This time, it’s the Islamic State (IS). After the attacks in Paris, Barack Obama, spokesman-in-chief for the United States of America, called that crew “the face of evil.” Shades of George W. Bush. The “evildoers” are back. And from every mountaintop, it seems, America now rings with calls to ramp up its war machine.

By the way, George W., how did that last war against the “evildoers” work out for you? Not quite the way you expected, right? I bet you didn’t imagine that your “Global War on Terror” would plant the seeds of an Islamic State and turn significant stretches of Iraq (and Syria) into fertile soil in which IS would grow into a brand new, even more frightening enemy.

But that’s the way wars against evil always seem to work.

Pardon me if I vent my exasperation with all the Washington policy-makers, past and present, surrounded by their so-called experts and those war-drum-beating pundits in the media. I know I shouldn’t be shocked anymore. I’ve seen it often enough as a historian studying wars against evil in the past—ever since biblical
times, in fact—and as a citizen watching wars in my own lifetime, ever since the one that tore Vietnam (and, incidentally, America) apart.

Still, it drives me crazy to watch policy-makers and experts making the same dumb mistakes time after time, several mistakes, actually, which synergistically add up to one self-defeating blunder after another.

What’s worse, the dominant trend in public opinion is so often on the side of just those mistakes. You’d think someone would learn something. And in that someone I include “we, the people,” the nation as a whole.

Yet now, facing the Islamic State, you guessed it: We’re doing it all over again.

Let me try to lay out our repetitive mistakes, all six of them, one by one, starting with…

**Mistake Number One:** Treating the enemy as absolute evil, not even human.

Barack Obama called the Paris tragedy “an attack on all of humanity,” which means that, even for the president, IS fighters stand outside that category. They are evidently some other species and merely appear to be human. And this was the mildest of descriptions in this overheated political season of ours. “The face of evil” sounds modest indeed compared to the vivid images offered by the Republicans vying to replace him. For Ben Carson, IS are a bunch of “rabid dogs”; for Ted Cruz, “scorpions.” Donald Trump calls them “insane,” “animals.”

All point to the same dangerous conclusion: Since we are human and they are not, we are their opposite in every way. If they are absolute evil, we must be the absolute opposite. It’s the old apocalyptic tale: God’s people versus Satan’s. It ensures that we never have to admit to any meaningful connection with the enemy. By this logic, it couldn’t be more obvious that the nation our leaders endlessly call “exceptional” and “indispensable,” the only nation capable of leading the rest of the world in the war against evil, bears no relationship to that evil.

That leads to…

**Mistake Number Two:** Buried in the assumption that the enemy is not in any sense human like us is absolution for whatever hand we may have had in sparking or contributing to evil’s rise and spread. How could we have fertilized the soil of absolute evil or bear any responsibility for its successes? It’s a basic postulate of wars against evil: God’s people must be innocent.
As a result, we don’t need to look at all the ways in which the United States, even in battle mode, continues to contribute to the successes of Islamic State fighters in Sunni Arab lands by, for instance, supporting an Iraqi Shi’ite regime in Baghdad that has a grim history of oppressing Sunnis, a history that drives many of them to tolerate, or even actively support IS.

By refusing a future role of any sort for Syria’s president Bashar al-Assad, we have hindered the diplomatic process that might heal the civil war in that country. Instead, we let the Syrian chaos continue as a breeding ground for IS expansion (though perhaps this policy is just beginning to change). Our long-term alliance with Saudi Arabia is equally counterproductive, protecting funding networks that feed a burgeoning caliphate.

Just as we don’t look at all this in the present, so we blind ourselves to what the US has done in the past. Consider this…

**Mistake Number Three:** Call it blotting out history. We lose the ability to really understand the enemy, because we ignore the actual history of how that enemy came to be, of how a network of relationships grew up in which we played, and continue to play, a central role.

The historical record is clear for all who care to look: The United States (the CIA in particular) was a key to the creation, funding, and arming of the mujahedeen, the rebel fighters in Afghanistan who took on the Soviet army there in the 1980s, the men (often extreme Islamists) whom President Ronald Reagan compared to our founding fathers. From that situation came Al Qaeda.

George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq cracked the region open and paved the way for the Islamic State. The Bush administration tore Iraq to shreds and then demobilized Saddam Hussein’s army and dispatched its members to the unemployment lines of a wrecked country.

One of those shreds, Al Qaeda in Iraq, populated by disaffected officers from that disbanded army, would later transform itself into the nucleus of the new Islamic State movement. Indeed the United States nurtured the present leadership of that movement in American military prisons in Iraq, where we introduced them to each other, so to speak. The process was at least hastened, and perhaps ultimately caused, by the vehement anti-Sunni bias of the Shi’ite Iraqi government, which the United States installed in power and also nurtured.
To sustain our image of ourselves as innocents in the whole affair, we have to blot out this empirical history and replace it with a myth (not so surprising, given that any war against evil is a mythic enterprise). That’s not to say that we deny all the facts. We just pick and choose the ones that fit our myth best.

In that tale, the enemy is simply what Christians for centuries have called the devil, which brings us to…

**Mistake Number Four:** We assume that the enemy, like Lucifer himself, does evil just for the sake of doing it. Even the most liberal parts of the media often can’t see IS fighters as more than “lunatics” bent on “slaughter for its own sake.”

Under such circumstances, what a foolish task it obviously is even to think about the enemy’s actual motives. After all, to do so would be to treat them as humans, with human purposes arising out of history. It would smack of sympathy for the devil.

Of course, this means that, whatever we might think of their actions, we generally ignore a wealth of evidence that the Islamic State’s fighters couldn’t be more human or have more comprehensible motivations. In fact, if you look hard enough, you can find evidence of just that.

*The Atlantic*, for instance, gained some attention for publishing an article by Graeme Wood that explored the complex religious ideas of the IS movement. *In The New York Review of Books*, Scott Atran and Nafes Hamid offered insights from people who had taken the time to actually talk with IS fighters or former fighters about its strategy and their own motives in becoming part of it. In this manner, Atran and Hamid helped explain the great mystery of IS (if you believe it is an inhuman organization): How can it attract so many young followers, especially from the United States and Europe? Why do some disaffected young men and women find the movement “profoundly alluring”?

Olivier Roy, a leading scholar of political Islam, has answered that many of these youth, full of “frustration and resentment against society,” are lured by the fantasy of joining a “small brotherhood of super-heroes.” But a recent study by the Program in Extremism at George Washington University, full of rich details on American IS supporters, concluded that “their motivations are diverse and defy easy analysis.”
Add up this sort of evidence and you’re likely to come to a startling and, in our present context, deeply unsettling conclusion. It’s not just that IS fighters are distinctly human, but that in some ways they are eerily like us. After all, we, too, have a military that uses an ideological narrative to recruit young people and prepare them to be willing to die for it. Our military, too, is savvy in using social media and various forms of advertising and publicity to deploy its narrative effectively. Like IS recruits, youngsters join our military for all sorts of reasons, but some because they are rootless, disaffected, and in search of a belief system, or at least an exciting adventure (even one that may put them in danger of losing their lives). And don’t forget that those young recruits, like the IS fighters, often have only the sketchiest grasp of what exactly they are signing up to die for or of the nature of the conflicts they may be involved in.

Our state ideology is, of course, secular. But most of us are certainly familiar personally (or at one remove) with American religious fundamentalists whose beliefs share much with the IS narrative. On both sides, people want to turn back the clock of history and live according to a sacred plan supposedly etched in stone many centuries ago.

There are, in fact, striking parallels—and I say this as a professor of religious studies—between the evangelical mood and methods of our fundamentalists and those of the Islamic State. Both agree that one must choose between God’s truth (derived from an ancient text) and the devil’s. Both offer the psycho-social comfort of a community supposedly living by immutable laws. Some of our fundamentalists, like the Christian Reconstructionists, would be happy to see this nation governed under religious law, as long as it’s their religion we’re talking about.

Whatever any of us think of our homegrown fundamentalists, we would hardly deny them their humanity, even if we often wonder what leads them to such (to many of us) strange beliefs. So here’s the question: Why shouldn’t we be just as curious about the believers of the Islamic State, even if they are our enemies?

Remember, to understand is not to justify. Quite the opposite, understanding often opens up ways of thinking more constructively and creatively about how to respond to such a challenge. It’s clear that Islamic State strategists understand American and European political cultures well indeed and, as they’ve repeatedly shown, they use that understanding to their grim advantage. They know just how to provoke us into anti-Muslim rhetoric and belligerent policies, which they
find most useful to their project and their movement. Like classic judo warriors, they employ our immense strength remarkably effectively against us.

Every one of Washington’s words and acts of war, every ally like Great Britain that joins the bombing campaign against IS, only confirms the Islamic State’s message that Muslims are under attack by the West. All of it only plays into the IS’s own apocalyptic worldview. Every step in the process makes the IS more attractive to Muslims who feel oppressed and marginalized by the West. So think of every threat uttered in the presidential campaign here and every bomb now being dropped as yet more global recruitment posters arriving “like manna from heaven” for that movement. Each is an invitation to launch yet more Paris-style attacks.

Our blindness to them as human beings, and to all the ways we have influenced them, increases their power and undermines our power to shape the outcome of events in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere in the Greater Middle East. Ironically, we accept this loss of power willingly, even eagerly, because it allows us to hold on to what seems to matter most to us: our vision of a war against inhuman evildoers, which brings us to…

**Mistake Number Five:** To convince ourselves that the Islamic State is evil incarnate, we imagine that the enemy is as relentless, intractable, and implacable as the devil himself. As a result, we also imagine that nothing we could do might diminish their will to evil. Since, as we see it, we had nothing to do with creating these monsters, no changes in our policies or actions could possibly influence their behavior. And since they are just crazy—not capable of normal rationality—there is no point in trying to talk with them.

By this route we finally, inevitably, arrive at…

**Mistake Number Six:** The belief that we have only one option: annihilation. Or if that proves impossible, despite the military forces at our disposal, then at least containing them forever.

In fact, the presidential candidates of this moment all demand annihilation and nothing less. In Donald Trump’s words, “bomb the shit out of ‘em.” In Hillary Clinton’s more demure formulation, “crush ISIS…break the group’s momentum and then its back.” Even Bernie Sanders agrees: “Our priority must be…to destroy the brutal and barbaric ISIS regime.”

The dream of a war of annihilation against evil has a long, long history in white America. It began in 1636 when Puritans in New England wiped out the Pequot...
tribe, promising that such a lesson would prevent further attacks by other tribes. In fact, it created a spiral of violence and counter-violence, and a war-against-evil template that the country still follows nearly four centuries later in its “war on terror.” The current conflict in Iraq and Syria seems only to be locking us into that template and its guaranteed cycle of violence ever more firmly.

Why do we as a nation keep on playing into the same dismal scenario and committing the same mistakes? Why this seemingly irresistible urge to fight yet another war against evil?

I worry that the answer to such questions may lie in what I’ve called an American myth of national insecurity. It tells us that we will always be at war with evildoers bent on destroying us; that this war (whichever the latest one may be) is the mission and the meaning of our nation; and that the only way to feel like a real American is to enlist permanently in permanent war.

In other words, even as we stoke the Islamic State, we stoke ourselves as well. The longer we fight, the more deeply we are seized by fear. The more we fear, the more fiercely we are determined to fight. Perhaps the point is not to win the war but to remain trapped in this vicious circle, which feels perversely comforting because it offers a sense of unified national identity as nothing else can in our otherwise deeply divided nation.

National myths are, however, invented by human beings, and we are always capable of changing our minds. Who knows? Maybe someday the Islamic State will figure out that brutal killing and other acts of horror in the name of the caliphate are not such a good idea after all. And maybe the United States will figure out that depending on an eternal, self-defeating war against evil for our national identity is a huge mistake after all. Maybe.

New York Times: “Americans Attracted to ISIS Find an ‘Echo Chamber’ on Social Media”, December 8, 2015

By Scott Shane, Matt Apuzzo, and Eric Schmitt

WASHINGTON — When a lonely Virginia teenager named Ali Amin got curious about the Islamic State last year and went online to learn more, he found a virtual community awaiting. It had its own peculiar language, stirring imagery and just the
warm camaraderie, sense of adventure and devotion to a cause that were missing from his dull suburban life.

At 17, the precocious son of a Yemeni immigrant family, he quickly developed online relationships with older Islamic State supporters around the globe. There was Zubair in Britain, Uthman in South Africa and Abdullah in Finland, who urged him to start a Twitter account under the name AmreekiWitness, or American witness. Mr. Amin drew several thousand followers, sparred online with the State Department, engaged with prominent Islamic State propagandists and developed quite a name among English-speaking fans of the militants — until his arrest in February.

“For the first time, I felt I was not only being taken seriously about very important and weighty topics, but was actually being asked for guidance,” Mr. Amin wrote in August to the judge overseeing his case, expressing regret for what he portrayed as a disastrous youthful mistake. “By assimilating into the Internet world instead of the real world, I became absorbed in a ‘virtual’ struggle while disconnecting from what was real: my family, my life and my future.”

As the Obama administration takes on the multidimensional challenge posed by the Islamic State after the killings in San Bernardino, Calif., the online community of sympathizers in the United States is a critical focus. They number in the hundreds, experts say, and fit no single profile. Among those whose flirtations took a serious turn and led to criminal charges are a trio of teenage siblings from Chicago, a former Air Force mechanic in his late 40s from New Jersey, and a mother of two from Philadelphia.

In fact, they have little in common except one thing: the weeks or months spent marinating in the rhetoric and symbolism of the Islamic State, courtesy of Twitter and other Internet platforms.

It is in this electronic hothouse of mutual support, a sort of round-the-clock pep rally for a cause most Muslims shun, that Americans join other English speakers to try out defiant screen names, throw around Arabic words they have often just learned, and seek to outdo one another in pious zeal.
Some merely express anger at American foreign policy or at what they see as mistreatment of Muslims overseas. Others go further, trying to reach Islamic State territory or plotting violence at home.

Like most heady American romances with the Islamic State, Mr. Amin’s came to a crashing halt. In late August, he was sentenced to 11 years in prison after pleading guilty to material support for a terrorist group. Americans who managed to reach Syria have suffered a still grimmer fate, dying on distant battlefields. And last week, in California, two admirers of the extremist group were shot dead by the police after attacking an office holiday gathering and killing 14 people.

The full story of the radicalization of the attackers, Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik, is still emerging as the F.B.I. retrieves records from deleted computer drives and smashed cellphones. But Ms. Malik’s decision, as the shooting began, to post on Facebook a pledge of loyalty to the leader of the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, suggested that the couple had been exposed to the Internet world created by the group’s supporters and recruiters.

“It’s a closed community — almost a clique,” said Seamus Hughes, co-author of a report, “ISIS in America,” released last week by George Washington University’s Program on Extremism. “They share memes and inside jokes, terms and phrases you’d only know if you were a follower.”

The George Washington University report underscored the diversity of the 71 people in the United States charged with crimes related to the Islamic State since March 2014: 40 percent were converts to Islam, defying any ethnic profile. They were young, with an average age of 26; overwhelmingly American citizens or legal residents; and 14 percent were women.

But all, or nearly all, had spent hours on the Internet trumpeting their feelings about the Islamic State and engaging with English speakers from many other countries.
fact, nearly all were arrested after their online posts drew the attention of the F.B.I.

An Insular Community

Finding the Islamic State’s corner of the Internet is not hard. In March, Nader Saadeh of New Jersey performed simple online searches for the term “ISIS.” He read newspaper articles and looked at maps. Within weeks, he was downloading hourlong propaganda videos. At the end of April, prosecutors said, he bought a plane ticket to Jordan in hopes of getting to Syria to fight.

Curious web surfers can easily recognize the distinctive iconography that Islamic State supporters embrace. The black flag used by many jihadist groups, often inscribed in white with the Shahada, or Islamic creed, is popular. Portraits of jihadist heroes, notably the American Al Qaeda propagandist Anwar al-Awlaki, are regularly featured. Green birds, a symbol of paradise, and lions, a reference to warriors as “lions of Allah,” are favorites. Keonna Thomas, 30, a Philadelphia mother charged this year with trying to join the Islamic State, posted on Twitter as YoungLioness.

Like political followers or sports fans, Islamic State supporters post videos and make memes to share with online friends. But the videos sometimes show beheadings, executions or angry lectures. And the photos declare their allegiance (“We are all ISIS”) or glorify young men with automatic weapons.

Even novices learn to lace their posts with transliterated Arabic: “kuffar” for non-Muslims; “shahid” for martyr; “khilafa” for the caliphate, the unified Muslim state that the group purports to be building. “It’s a shallow appropriation of things from an outside culture to demonstrate authenticity,” said Alberto M. Fernandez, a former State Department counter-radicalization official who is now at the Middle East Media Research Institute, and who wrote an essay on the insider language of Islamic State fans.
For more advanced users, there is “taghut,” a blanket epithet for opponents of jihad; “jizya,” a tax to be imposed on Christians and Jews who will not convert; and “baqiyah,” or “here to stay,” shorthand to announce Twitter users’ return after their accounts have been suspended.

Twitter remains the major gateway for those infatuated by the Islamic State, though YouTube, Facebook, Ask.fm, Tumblr, Instagram and other sites have a place in the group’s online ecosystem. As Twitter has more aggressively suspended the accounts of overt supporters, they have often migrated to Telegram, Kik, WhatsApp and other services that allow private communications, said Humera Khan, executive director of Muflehun, a nonprofit that studies radicalization and how to counter it.

Ms. Khan said that more sophisticated Islamic State promoters policed the public sites, circulating the screen names of people who had challenged the group’s claims and encouraging others to block their posts. The result, she said, “is an echo chamber where there’s a sense that no other view is legitimate.”

The insular culture reinforces the idea that the United States is at war with Islam and portrays terrorist groups as nobly resisting America’s global military ambitions. The group’s arguments feed off American military action overseas, as well as anti-Muslim populism of the kind recently promoted by Donald J. Trump.

“Al-Qa’ida said it loud and clear: we are fighting the American invasion and their hegemony over the earth and the people,” Mufid A. Elfgeeh, a 30-year-old from Rochester wrote on Twitter before being charged last year with recruiting for the Islamic State. In another post, he predicted that the group would one day rule the world.

Calculated Recruitment

Into this world of Americans and English speakers from many other countries, the Islamic State’s propagandists regularly
insert professionally produced material. Javier Lesaca, a visiting scholar at George Washington University’s School of Media and Public Affairs, said the group had produced some 1,015 videos since January 2014, including at least 37 in English aimed at recruiting foreign fighters.

The videos “are based and constructed according to Western values and images,” he said.

Their consistent message, Mr. Lesaca said, is that the Islamic State is a social movement devoted to protecting Muslims and fighting an unfair global economic system; that it does not discriminate on the basis of race or nationality; that it uses violence in self-defense and in ways that mimic Western films and video games; and that Westerners who join the fight in Syria and Iraq are normal people fighting a just war.

In fact, like other American followers of the Islamic State, Mr. Amin was drawn into the virtual jihadist world by his concern about atrocities being carried out against civilians by the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, according to court documents. He had Crohn’s disease, a chronic gastrointestinal disorder, which derailed a promising academic record and left him isolated.

Mr. Amin raised his concerns about Syria with several adults, including two imams and a Christian minister, his lawyer, Joseph Flood, said. None gave him much time or took his questions about Islam seriously. But on his laptop, alone in his bedroom in Manassas, Va., he found powerful emotional support for his militant pronouncements.

“He’s being told, ‘Not only are you smart and wise — you’re a leader,’ ” Mr. Flood said.

Soon, Mr. Amin, who displayed on his Twitter account an image of an Islamic State flag flying over the White House, was driving a friend to the airport so he could travel to Syria and posting an article on how to use the digital currency Bitcoin to support the jihadists.
The Internet had allowed him to develop “a secret, independent identity” without his family’s knowledge, Mr. Flood said. Mr. Amin adopted a stern, adult tone to instruct others in online security measures and he drew the State Department’s anti-Islamic State Twitter account, @ThinkAgainTurnAway, into an exchange. For an ailing teenager with a protective mother, it was an intoxicating time.

“Ali’s involvement in these activities came as a complete shock to everybody who knew him, because he was such a kind and gentle person,” Mr. Flood said.

Law enforcement officials say one advantage has been that many of those who go online to cheer on the Islamic State have been astonishingly indiscreet. Abdurasul Juraboev, 24, a Brooklyn man who worked in a gyro shop and was arrested in February, had posted on a pro-Islamic State website that he wished he could join the group abroad. But he wondered whether there were other ways to contribute, writing, “What I’m saying is, to shoot Obama and then get shot ourselves, will it do?” He lamented that he had no weapons.

A Kansas man, John T. Booker Jr., posted last year on Facebook: “I will soon be leaving you forever so goodbye! I’m going to wage jihad and hopes that i die.”

“Getting ready to be killed in jihad is a HUGE adrenaline rush!!” he wrote, according to court documents. “I am so nervous. NOT because I’m scared to die but I am eager to meet my lord.” He was arrested outside an Army base as he connected wires to what he thought was a bomb; it was a fake provided by an F.B.I. informant.

But such brazen displays of jihadist sentiment and public confessions to crimes are becoming less common, experts said. The steady string of arrests and the crackdown by social media companies are having an effect.
“The network of ISIS supporters is getting smaller, but tighter and more inward looking,” said Ms. Khan, the expert on countering extremism, adding that the San Bernardino attack may accelerate that trend by intensifying government scrutiny. That may shrink the Islamic State’s propaganda profile, but it will also make the group’s circles harder to penetrate and its supporters more difficult for law enforcement to track, she said.

But the initial reaction to the San Bernardino attack from English-speaking Islamic State supporters showed no such discretion, said Anat Agron, who tracks supporters for the Middle East Media Research Institute.

“People were rejoicing, celebrating,” Ms. Agron said. “They were talking about how beautiful it was for a married couple to do this together.”

Roll Call: “In Washington, a Failure to Act to Counter Homegrown Terrorism”, December 8, 2015

By Patricia Murphy

Everybody has somebody in Washington. There’s the sugar lobby, the drug lobby and the insurance lobby. The unions have their people, and of course, the associations in D.C. have an association of their own to represent them on Capitol Hill.

One group of Americans, homegrown radical Islamist terrorists, don’t have a lobbyist in Washington. But they really don’t need one for all of the work that Republicans, Democrats and the National Rifle Association seem to have been doing for them lately.

In the days since Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, murdered 14 people in San Bernardino, Calif., it has become obvious that the ideology of Islamist terrorism in America has evolved and changed radically since two jets flew into the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001.
Terrorists can be men or women. They may act with a terrorist network overseas or come up with their plans completely alone, radicalized only by the messages they see through social media. The terror threat in the United States today is diffuse, dynamic, difficult to predict and sometimes, tragically, impossible to prevent.

But in the face of the asymmetric danger we’re facing, Washington seems to be totally calcified by political dynamics that leave ordinary Americans wondering whose side they’re on.

In the days after the killing, President Barack Obama waited for days to call the shooting an act of terror. In his Oval Office address Sunday night, the president said the killers had “gone down the dark path of radicalization,” but never called them radical Islamist terrorists, despite all evidence that they are.

The president seemed to want to be careful not to group Islamist terrorists with Muslim-Americans, which is prudent and important. But he also seemed not to be deeply worried by the new culture of terror in America, which would make him nearly the only person in the country who is not.

If the president’s failures were rhetorical, House and Senate Republicans’ failures were as easy to spot as a “no” vote on last week’s measure to prevent anyone on the terror watch list from purchasing a firearm. The NRA had alerted its members immediately, “Tell your senators to vote NO on any and all gun control proposals up for debate in today’s session,” including the vote on the watch list.

Putting aside the fact that Farook and Malik were never on the terrorist watch list and would not have been affected by the legislation, how is it possible that potential terrorists who cannot board a plane for fear that they could blow it up could legally purchase a weapon tomorrow if they wanted to?

The United States has gone to great lengths to destroy ISIS and enact arms embargoes against America’s enemies overseas, but it remains breathtakingly easy for would-be terrorists to arm themselves on U.S. soil with weapons of mass carnage. Other than a moment of silence for the victims of the shootings, Congress is not expected to do much of anything in the near future that could prevent San Bernardino from happening again, anywhere else.

Seamus Hughes, the deputy director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University’s Center for Cyber & Homeland Security, told me that although the threat of homegrown terror, like the attack in San Bernardino, has
been known to Washington policymakers for years, very little has been done to combat it.

“It’s fair to say there haven’t been any policy changes since we’ve seen the threat increase,” Hughes said. He said Congress could do more to try to prevent attacks, through education on warning signs and pushing resources out to communities closest to the threat. “But at the end of the day, if somebody is extremely motivated, it is very hard to stop them,” Hughes said. “The question becomes how large is the carnage.”

In 2011, Adam Gadahn, the American-born spokesman for al-Qaida, starred in a recruiting video to urge like-minded American citizens to up arms against American targets and use the freedoms that are built into our society against us. “America is absolutely awash with easily obtainable firearms,” he said to the camera, detailing the easiest ways to buy an assault rifle. “So what are you waiting for?” Gadahn asked.

There have been five homegrown terror attacks since Gadahn made that video. More can be done to stop the next one. The question for Congress and the president is, “What are you waiting for?”

The Sacramento Bee: “After San Bernardino attack, tech firms are urged to do more to fight terrorism”, December 8, 2015

By Evan Halper

WASHINGTON

The attack in San Bernardino has put tech firms under new pressure to do more to fight terrorist recruitment, propaganda and plotting online, alarming Silicon Valley companies that have previously succeeded in blocking government efforts that they say would undermine privacy.

Hillary Clinton and President Barack Obama both have publicly called on technology companies to cooperate more after last week’s shootings, saying they must work harder to help confront the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, online.
Their remarks renewed the question of whether existing laws offer too much protection for Internet freedom at the expense of finding and stopping terrorists. The comments came as the directors of both the CIA and FBI were already charging that encryption services provided by some firms enable terrorists to operate out of the sight of intelligence agencies and police.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., has led a push in Congress for legislation that would require social media companies to root out and report suspicious activity. Tech firms and privacy advocates beat back an effort by Feinstein earlier this year. But the landscape has changed, and her proposal is now getting a second look.

"We’re going to have to have more support from our friends in the technology world to deny (terrorists) online space," Clinton said in a speech here Sunday. "Technology is often called the great disrupter. We need to put the great disrupters to work in disrupting ISIS and stopping them from having this open platform for communicating with their dedicated fighters and their wannabes, like the people in San Bernardino."

Clinton emphasized that Silicon Valley must be more engaged despite "all the usual complaints. Freedom of speech, et cetera."

Leaders of technology firms say they have been quietly working with law enforcement in recent months to find suspicious activity on their websites and apps, remove it and report it to law enforcement. Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are constantly being scraped for suspicious content.

But the firms’ cooperation so far has not quieted complaints from law enforcement officials, nor the growing questions on Capitol Hill.

"There is a general sense that companies are not doing enough," said James Lewis, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "That's the problem, not that they aren't doing anything. It's like people woke up one day and realized ISIS had 20,000 Twitter accounts. How do you get a handle on it?"

The firms, wary of alienating their users, have been coy about precisely what they do and do not report to law enforcement - several declined to answer questions - but there is general agreement in Washington that the relationship between tech companies and government agencies has improved since a low point a couple of years ago, in the immediate aftermath of Edward Snowden's...
disclosures of widespread government snooping on Americans' communications.

"We share the government’s goal of keeping terrorist content off our site," said a statement from Facebook, which is under particular scrutiny because one of the San Bernardino attackers pledged allegiance to Islamic State in a Facebook post that investigators discovered after the shootings.

"Facebook has zero tolerance for terrorists, terror propaganda, or the praising of terror activity, and we work aggressively to remove it as soon as we become aware of it," the company said. Facebook’s policy is to alert law enforcement if the company becomes aware "of a threat of imminent harm or a planned terror attack."

Feinstein is unimpressed. She recently recounted how she tried, without success, to get attorneys from tech companies to remove posts that provided detailed instructions on how to build bombs. Yet whether lawmakers could successfully mandate what kind of content is and is not acceptable is unclear.

"There are enormous limitations as to what you can do," said Lorenzo Vidino, a specialist on extremism at George Washington University’s Center for Cyber & Homeland Security. Tech companies lack the manpower to monitor every posting on their sites, he said, and Congress would be hard-pressed to provide clear instruction about what material must be taken down and reported to the government.

While Feinstein and Clinton have talked about militant groups' use of social media to recruit and inspire potential terrorists, the Obama administration seems more focused on the problem of encryption. Tech companies have fought furiously to keep lawmakers from mandating that they build a so-called back door to encryption technologies - a way for law enforcement agencies to gain access to otherwise encoded communications. Prosecutors and intelligence officials say current technologies can make it impossible to examine suspects' communications even if police have a valid court order.

Law enforcement officials note that some tech companies have boasted to customers that when their technologies are used, nobody can gain access to their messages ever, including the government.

The Manhattan district attorney's office said in a report issued in November that it was unable to execute 111 search warrants for smartphones over the last year
because they were running on encrypted technology offered through Apple’s iOS 8 operating system.

On Sunday, in his Oval Office speech, Obama suggested he is preparing to act on those concerns when he said: "I will urge high-tech and law enforcement leaders to make it harder for terrorists to use technology to escape from justice."

A senior White House official said, however, that the administration so far is not reconsidering a decision Obama made earlier this year to avoid asking Congress to pass new legislation on encryption. Officials say they believe a legislative effort would be hopeless and are looking to forge a voluntary agreement with tech companies.

Shortly after the attacks in Paris on Nov. 13, CIA Director John Brennan warned "there are a lot of technological capabilities that are available right now that make it exceptionally difficult, both technically as well as legally, for intelligence and security services to have the insight they need" into potential attacks.

"Hand-wringing" over the government’s data-collection efforts, such as those disclosed by Snowden, had left intelligence agencies without tools they need to track down terrorists online, he said.

A back door to encrypted messages is high on the law enforcement wish list. Tech companies warn that forcing them to provide one would make Internet users less safe, as such back doors could be exploited by hackers and cyberterrorists. The Internet Association, an industry group that represents major Silicon Valley firms, argues it would be unwise to engineer vulnerabilities into technology that protects not just messages between anonymous users, but also the nation’s electricity grid and world banking systems.

But pressure on the companies is not just coming from Washington. Leaders in Europe grappling with terrorism are starting to demand American tech companies help find a solution to the encryption problem, particularly after reports that the attackers in Paris may have successfully used encryption to evade law enforcement.

"Some people seem to hope if we just sit tight the pressure will go away," Lewis said. "But if there are more incidents, you are going to see an international debate on how to deal with encryption."

By Garrett W Haake

WASHINGTON- A six-month study of ISIS’ recruiting efforts in the United States revealed that the terror group’s American recruits fit no discernible pattern or profile in race, gender, socio-economic status or age – suggesting a broad and deep pool of theologically naïve and potentially vulnerable American Muslim targets for the expanding terror group.

In a report released one day before the San Bernardino terrorist attack, researchers from George Washington University’s Program on Extremism tracked 71 people arrested in the United States on ISIS-related charges.

“They were old, they were young. Black, white, rich, poor. It kind of didn’t matter,” the report’s co-author, Seamus Hughes told WUSA9. “There was no one particular profile when it comes to ISIS recruits.”

Hughes explained ISIS' use of social media to reach across the Atlantic Ocean and into American homes has three parts. First, ISIS recruiters seek out and groom recruits who ask questions about their faith or about ISIS on Twitter or other social media platforms. They slowly and meticulously groom them, introducing extremist ideology along the way.

Second, the ISIS recruiters often act as travel agents; arranging for would-be recruits to travel to Syria or other countries to receive religious and military training.

“They’re providing logistical support,” Hughes said. “A phone number to call when you get to Turkey to be able to cross that border [into Syria].”
In the third step, ISIS recruiters act in a way the FBI describes as the “devil on your shoulder,” pushing them to take violent action in the name of jihad wherever they may be.

Hughes said the most prominent example of this type of radicalization may be the case of the two would-be terrorists who attacked a “Draw Muhammad” cartoon contest in Garland, Tx. last year. In that case, as has been reported in the San Bernardino case, one shooter pledged allegiance to ISIS just before or during the attack.

There were clear signs of the shooters’ radicalization in Texas. Hughes says similar signs were likely missed in the California case.

“It would be surprising to me if no one else saw that kind of radicalization happening in slow motion; watching that train wreck in slow motion,” he said.

Hughes believed the U.S. government, mosques and families all need to do more to reach out to potentially vulnerable would-be ISIS recruits before the cross a threshold that they can’t turn back from.

Boston Globe: “Both San Bernardino shooters radicalized at least 2 years ago”, December 9, 2015

By Eric Tucker and Brian Melley

WASHINGTON — FBI Director James Comey says the two San Bernardino, California shooters were radicalized at least two years ago and had discussed jihad and martyrdom as early as 2013.

Comey told the Senate Judiciary Committee on Wednesday that Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, were radicalized even before they met online.

The couple wed last year.

Comey also said the couple was inspired by foreign terror organizations and described them as “homegrown violent extremists.”

He said the investigation is continuing.
Farook and Malik had gone undetected while planning the massacre that included amassing thousands of rounds of ammunition, high-powered guns and pipe bombs.

The FBI’s acknowledgement that the San Bernardino shooters had been radicalized Muslims for “quite some time” points to the difficulty discovering potential terrorists who keep a very low profile and shows the deadly consequences that can occur when identification comes too late.

“It appears these people were very good at hiding their intentions,” said David Schanzer, a Duke University public policy professor who runs a center that studies terrorism. “What this situation shows is it’s not a fool-proof system. ... A hundred percent prevention is not achievable.”

The couple, who lived quietly in a two-bedroom townhouse with their 6-month-old daughter and Farook’s mother, had not come to the attention of law enforcement before clothing themselves in black, donning face masks and bursting into an annual festive meeting of Farook’s county health department colleagues with guns blazing. They killed 14 people and wounded 21 last Wednesday before dying in a shootout with police about four hours later.

David Bowdich, chief of the FBI’s Los Angeles office, told reporters the agency was searching for how and where radicalization occurred and who might have led them to those beliefs.

Investigators believe Malik radicalized before meeting Farook, FBI spokeswoman Laura Eimiller said Tuesday, though she didn’t elaborate on what led the FBI to that conclusion. Farook, 28, a restaurant inspector born in the U.S. to a Pakistani family, radicalized before Malik, 29, emigrated to the U.S. from Pakistan in July 2014 on a fiancée visa and married him the next month.

America’s counterterrorism infrastructure has had success flagging individuals who try to travel abroad to fight alongside militants, fund operations overseas or who communicate online with overseas terrorists. But it’s been far more challenging for law enforcement to identify each and every individual who self-radicalizes online, a process the Islamic State has facilitated with slick Internet propaganda aimed at the disaffected.

“They’re not communicating with a terrorist organization, they’re not doing those other things that we have typically looked for when we’re looking for terrorists,” said John Cohen, a former Homeland Security Department counterterrorism coordinator.
Behavior in isolation isn’t likely to put a defendant on law enforcement’s radar. But sudden withdrawal from friends or family, for instance, starts hitting trip wires when combined with other actions, such as increased visits to hate-spewing chat rooms or radical change in appearance. Even then, law enforcement is challenged on a daily basis in separating individuals who hold radical views, which in and of itself is not a crime, from those who are plotting acts of violence or encouraging others in that direction.

“It’s a highly individualized process, and each person is different,” said Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University’s Center for Cyber Homeland Security, which recently issued a study showing that 56 people had been charged in the U.S. this year in connection with supporting the Islamic State. “The radicalization process could take a few years, it could take a few months.”

Mike German, a national security fellow at New York University Law School and a former FBI agent, said the government’s model to predict who will become a terrorist is flawed, partly because it focuses too much on those who adhere to a radical or extreme ideology.

“Certainly some of the people who become terrorists have expressed extreme thoughts before, but it’s not a causal factor,” German said. “There are many times more people holding radical beliefs who never engage in violent activity.”

The Obama administration, mindful of the problem, has created an initiative called Countering Violent Extremism that encourages communities to steer vulnerable young adults away from radicalization, though it’s unclear how successful that effort is.

FBI agents currently have hundreds of open inquiries in all 50 states related to terrorist ideology. When they identify someone they think is predisposed to violence, they’ve turned to a range of techniques — including sting operations involving informants and inoperable weapons and placing undercover agents in chat rooms — as part of their investigation.

They’re nonetheless constrained under Justice Department regulations in the investigative steps they may take. That guidance, known as the Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide, permits agents to check out a citizen’s suspicion even when there’s minimal factual basis for doing so.
Actually opening a full-blown investigation, and using tools such as surveillance and phone wiretaps, requires a significantly higher burden of evidence of wrongdoing.

“For law enforcement to take action, their investigation has to reveal that a person has gone beyond simply having extreme thoughts, and is actually moving in the direction of carrying out an act of violence,” Cohen said. “They have to be in the process of committing a crime.”

So far, the FBI has revealed little of what it’s learned about Farook and Malik and their planning, except for details about the weaponry they had, materials they had to make more pipe bombs and that both had been taking target practice. Malik also practiced at Riverside Magnum Range, where Farook shot at targets two days before the attack, Eimiller said.

Investigators also are trying to determine a money trail for funding of the operation. A U.S. official said Tuesday authorities are looking into a deposit made to Farook’s bank account prior to the shooting. The official, who had been briefed on the investigation but was not authorized to discuss it by name and spoke on condition of anonymity, would not further characterize the nature of the deposit or what was suspicious about it.

Hughes said the FBI surely is looking to see what red flags law enforcement might have been missed — part of a post-mortem analysis that follows every incident of this nature.

“What do you learn from this, and how do you mitigate the next attack?” he asked.


By Kelsey Warner

The married couple that carried out a massacre in San Bernardino, Calif., last Wednesday had been radicalized for some time, but there is no indication they were part of a larger terrorist cell, US Attorney General Loretta Lynch told reporters in London on Wednesday.
Tashfeen Malik, and her husband, Syed Rizwan Farook, were not on authorities’ radar prior to amassing thousands of rounds of ammunition, high-powered guns and pipe bombs, then perpetrati ng a massacre that killed 14 and injured 20 at a holiday gathering before they were killed in a shootout with police. Now investigators are trying to identify the origin of their radicalization and what events brought them to the Dec. 2 attack.

In the past, federal law enforcement officials have been able to identify dozens of Americans who support the Islamic State militant group before they have been able to carry out attacks or travel to Syria to join the Islamist radical group largely by monitoring online chatter. However, Ms. Malik and Mr. Farook kept a low profile right up until the attack. Investigators are pouring through their pasts in hopes of identifying any red flags that should be added to those that investigators already look for.

"We are trying to learn everything we can about both of these individuals, as individuals and as a couple, to determine why they chose that location, that event, that particular place to vent their rage," Ms. Lynch said, the Associated Press reports.

"We are essentially digging into their lives as far back as we can," she added. "Our view is that the radicalization had been going on for some time, but it's really too early to tell at this point what was the genesis of it for either of them."

Investigators believe Malik was radicalized before she met Farook, FBI spokeswoman Laura Eimiller said Tuesday, though she didn't add how the FBI had come to that conclusion. Farook an American-born restaurant inspector with parents from Pakistan, reportedly radicalized before Malik emigrated to the US from Pakistan in July 2014 on a fiancée visa and married him the following month.

While counterterrorism efforts have been successful stateside in identifying individuals who attempt to travel abroad to fight with extremists, who route money for criminal activity overseas, or who use the web to communicate with terrorists, it is proving more difficult for authorities to identify individuals who are self-radicalizing through the Islamic State’s web presence.
“It’s a closed community – almost a clique,” said Seamus Hughes, co-author of a report, “ISIS in America,” released last week by George Washington University’s Program on Extremism, in a recent interview with The New York Times. “They share memes and inside jokes, terms and phrases you’d only know if you were a follower.”

The FBI has a defined scope under Justice Department regulations in the investigative tactics it can use under the Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide, which allows agents to look into a citizen's reported suspicion even in times when there is minimal evidence for proceeding. However, for this self-radicalized pair, those suspicions didn't come to light until it was too late.

"They're not communicating with a terrorist organization, they're not doing those other things that we have typically looked for when we're looking for terrorists," said John Cohen, a former Homeland Security Department counterterrorism coordinator in an interview with Reuters.

To open an official investigation, which may include surveillance, there is a higher burden of evidence of wrongdoing for agents to move forward.

"For law enforcement to take action, their investigation has to reveal that a person has gone beyond simply having extreme thoughts, and is actually moving in the direction of carrying out an act of violence," Mr. Cohen said. "They have to be in the process of committing a crime."

CNN: “Why Trump is playing right into ISIS’ hands”, December 9, 2015

By Jonathan Russell

(CNN)With his comments, Donald Trump has confirmed that he is not a serious presidential candidate. If he were serious, he would know that preventing radicalization, extremism and terrorism is more important than soundbites, more complex than profiling, and more in need of a human rights-based approach than he seems able to contemplate.

America is hurting following the worst terrorist attack on its soil since 9/11. Trump knows he can exploit this hurt politically, and his advisers will have told him that when he talks tough, he polls well. Perhaps, then, it is more apt to say
Trump is serious about winning an election, even if he is not serious about being president.

The next U.S. President must consider radicalization of American Muslims an important issue for U.S. national security and must admit that it is more complex than Muslim immigration. The online communications strategy of ISIS means that American Muslims, once less vulnerable to jihadist recruitment than their European counterparts, are now part of that terrorist group's target audience.

The recent paper by George Washington University's Program on Extremism, "ISIS in America," reveals more than 250 Americans sought to join ISIS and 56 individuals have been arrested this year for ISIS-related activities -- a vast increase on comparable terrorist activity in previous years.

Further inspection of "ISIS in America" shows why Trump is wrong not right. The former director of the FBI Robert S. Mueller III said that the biggest threat comes from "self-radicalized, homegrown extremists in the United States" and that is backed up with current statistics that shows the FBI currently has 900 ongoing investigations against homegrown violent Islamist extremists linked to ISIS.

In other words, the national security threat and the support for ISIS in America is not coming from immigration or from refugees, but from a disparate set of people who are willing to change their behavior because they buy into the Islamist worldview propagated by ISIS and other organizations.

Maajid Nawaz's cursory look at perpetrators of terrorism on American soil shows that the San Bernardino terrorists were unknown to the authorities and one of them was female, the Boston bombers were white and of Caucasian heritage, and the 9/11 attackers purposefully shaved off their beards, attended strip clubs, and drank alcohol on practice flights. None of these people would be caught by the profiling proposed by Trump.

So Trump is wrong about the problem. But he is also wrong about the solution. He must know that counter-extremism policy is more complex than profiling, which would not only fail to make America safer (or indeed great again), it would likely exacerbate the extremist problem itself. The negative consequences of getting counter-extremism policy wrong can exacerbate radicalization in three main ways.
First, Trump has become a champion for the American far-right and their anti-Muslim rhetoric. He makes the mood music to which white supremacists dance. Those with a propensity to violence need an atmosphere in which their views have become normalized, and violence has become considered an appropriate option to action those views.

If Trump were to get elected, due to the fact that profiling and discrimination on the grounds of religion are completely unconstitutional and un-American, he would be unable to deliver this particular election promise. This will leave many of his anti-Muslim supporters unfulfilled, disenfranchised and motivated to act unilaterally in opposition to Muslims and Islam. He therefore won’t just increase anti-Muslim sentiment, his actions will also prompt more anti-Muslim violence.

Secondly, Trump will contribute to Islamist radicalization as his comments will make Muslims feel unwelcome in America. This grievance will fuel their identity crisis, which when combined are a potent combination for the vulnerability that ISIS is so adept at exploiting with their Islamist narrative. We must counter this narrative, but must avoid exacerbating this vulnerability too. ISIS thrives on the polarization of communities in Western countries and will be relishing a recruitment surge if Trump’s rhetoric continues.

Thirdly, Trump dominates conversations. While electorally, this may mean that he gets more airtime than his fellow Republican nominees, in counter-extremism conversations, it means that progressive evidence-based counter-extremism policy gets drowned out. It means these counter-extremists get smeared with accusations of wanting the same outcome as Trump and means that the whole domain gets dragged to the far-right.

We counter-extremism practitioners know that religious and anti-religious extremists feed off each other, and are both best countered from the centre, with a firm human rights basis, yet this is roundly ignored by this "presidential troll."

Donald J Trump is not serious. But if we are serious about opposing ISIS, preventing radicalization of American Muslims, and making "America Great Again", we should be serious about keeping Trump out of the White House.
The Verge: “Filtered extremism: how ISIS supporters use Instagram”, December 9, 2015

By Ashley Carman

Last week, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called ISIS the "most effective recruiter in the world," and pushed tech companies to help curtail the group’s ability to woo recruits through online videos and social media. While studies like one last week by researchers from George Washington University show that Twitter is still ISIS's most significant online recruitment tool, the group also uses more intimate platforms, like Instagram.

Compared to Twitter, ISIS's presence on Instagram is more informal. Users often post pro-ISIS images and memes, as opposed to the screenshots and video clips disseminated by the group's official channels. For users in Syria, Instagram allows them to project a semblance of normal life under ISIS: home-cooked meals and views out their window, for instance, with hashtags and symbols declaring support for the group.

Overall, these accounts normalize radical ideas, says Sarah Gilkes, a research associate at GWU's Program on Extremism who worked on the study. Of the 71 Americans charged with crimes relating to ISIS, the study found that almost all spent time in ISIS’s insular online communities. After seeing hundreds of memes with Islamic State ideology superimposed, the ideas suddenly don’t seem so extreme. Plus, many radicalized people often come from troubled backgrounds or unstable family situations. These platforms can give them a sense of community.

We worked with Gilkes to examine ISIS supporters' Instagram accounts. Many accounts denounce Western intervention in Syria and allude to more extremist views, but only certain ones use the specific hashtags and imagery that indicate ISIS support. We include some examples below, along with Gilkes’ explanation of what we’re seeing. All photos were publicly available. It's important to keep in mind that while an account might clearly communicate support for the group, it doesn’t mean an individual will resort to violence. The vast majority of pro-ISIS people will never commit a crime, Gilkes says. That often only occurs after a variety of triggers, depending on the person.
This account appears to be run by a young woman in England, going off her geotags and several selfies. In this image, Gilkes explains, the user includes the hashtag #taqwa, which means piety. Her image and caption tap into themes of nationality versus unity under a religion. A primary ISIS narrative is unity of the "true Muslim community" and loyalty to that community versus to the State, Gilkes says. "Color doesn't make a difference, it's all about the concept of unity," she says, which this post directly states. Also of note is the use of an emoji pointing toward the sky. Gilkes says this is often used among radical supporters.

The flag, also a clear indicator of support, translates to "There is no God but God" on the top portion. In the circle, it states "Allah, Messenger, Muhammad," which relates to the second part of the Testimony of Faith, or the Shahada. This is a common jihadi theme.

The ISIS flag also comes up in the below profile picture.

The woman’s account description says she doesn’t like "coconuts," which, in ISIS’s online world, is derogatory slang for people the group deems to be not true believers. This includes both Sunnis and Shiites who speak out against the group or deny their Muslim identity. The woman also uses the word "ukhtis," which means sisters, so she’s encouraging other interested women to message her privately.

Just like any other online community, its participants have created their own style and imagery to demonstrate membership. The group frequently references green birds and will often combine a green heart or green circle emoji with a bird emoji to convey the green bird imagery. The green bird is said to be the state martyrs reach when they get to heaven.

Lion imagery is commonly used, as well, because the animal represents bravery in Islam.

Users also commonly note when their accounts are new and reference previous usernames. Gilkes and her fellow researchers noted in their paper that, as much as these accounts can be taken down, they almost always come back. These takedowns are often bragged about and posted as a "badge of honor," Gilkes says.

We can see lion imagery in the background of an ISIS flag in one user’s post.
Instagram also allows for easy sharing of ISIS mantras in digestible images. The below is an example.

This image is a bit bizarre, Gilkes notes, because the Arabic on the sign doesn't have its letters connecting — they stand alone — and some are backwards. Looking past that, though, the picture is fairly self-explanatory. This user is saying there's no way to "idly sit by and still be sincere in your desire to become a martyr," Gilkes says. A person has to act upon that desire to truly make good on that belief.

This user posted the below later in the week:

Although this image by itself isn't necessarily radical, his use of the word "Khilafa," or caliphate, indicates at least an interest in the group. When combined with his prior post, one can conclude he supports ISIS's radical ideology.

This image plays to Instagram's strengths. People can easily curate an image of their lives and idealize it for followers. Below are two photos, one of which the researchers used in their paper, that represent dispatches from Syria.

"You hear a lot about the violent content that ISIS puts out, but you don't hear a lot about the images of shopping in Mosul or Ramadan festivals and celebrations," Gilkes says. "ISIS curated this image of themselves as brutal and violent, but they also have this aspect where the State comes in." While sifting through accounts, there were occasional photos of what appear to be dead fighters, but there are also pictures of everyday life, which has been one of the platform's pulls.

In this photo, used by the researchers in their paper, a commenter chimes in with anti-ISIS rhetoric. Many people attempt to engage with supporters on Twitter, too. (Even hacktivist collective Anonymous tried to take down the group's accounts.) However, on Twitter particularly, Gilkes says this calling out of ISIS members doesn't accomplish much. More often than not, the dissenting user will end up on one of ISIS's curated block lists, and the group's online community will continue to interact with only its own world view.

While Clinton and other politicians have pointed to technology companies as the solution, it's still unclear how social media platform operators could
discourage such accounts, especially when their content doesn’t breach current terms of service. Most images are benign and show support through slang like "coconuts" or emoji.

For its part, an Instagram spokesperson said in a comment to The Verge that there is no place for terrorists on its platform.

"We work aggressively to ensure that we do not have terrorists or terror groups using the site, and we also remove any content that praises or supports terrorism," the spokesperson said. "We have also developed simple, powerful reporting tools that allow the community to flag content to our reviewers. The global review team responds to reports from the community around the clock and we prioritize safety-related reports for immediate review."

Suspensions get rid of one voice temporarily, Gilkes says, but she compares it to Whac-A-Mole. She says the solution to ISIS’s social media campaigns might be actual people rather than reporting tools.

"I think really the power is in people with credible voices, whether on the community level, in the religious sphere, or in the government," she says. "These credible voices [need to be] coming in and turning the ISIS propaganda on its head, and sort of reveal what life under ISIS rule looks like."

That being said, different messages resonate with different people, so finding one that works will likely prove to be the most difficult struggle.


By Monica Crowley

Forget the bogus “war on women.”

There is an actual war going on, and the enemy is engaged in a “war with women.”

The barbaric Islamic State is recruiting so many Western women that it’s giving new meaning to the phrase the “feminine mystique.”
Since ISIS emerged as the world’s richest and most fearsome terrorist organization, it has seized large territories in Iraq and Syria, earned $3 million per day in oil revenue on the black market, executed several Americans and hundreds of others, downed a Russian commercial jet, carried out sophisticated attacks in Paris and Beirut, and inspired attacks from Algeria to Oklahoma to San Bernardino, Calif.

The jihad — led by the Islamic State, al Qaeda, the Khorasans, Hamas, Hezbollah, Boko Haram, Islamic Jihad, Ansar al-Shariah, al-Nusra Front, the Muslim Brotherhood and countless others — is everywhere, despite President Obama’s repeated claims that the threat is “contained.”

Male jihadists now know that if their mission to spread Islam by the sword and install Shariah globally is to succeed, they’re going to need women.

But the “fairer sex” these ladies are not.

In the past, militants have welcomed the support of women as mothers who sacrifice their children as suicide bombers, propagandists and covers for terrorist activity when authorities closed in.

Now, however, terrorist organizations are actively recruiting women as incubators of the next generation of fighters, as social media queens and most disturbingly, as killers.

According to a new report from George Washington University’s Program on Extremism, of the 71 recruits for the Islamic State arrested in the United States since 2014, 10 were women.

As The Washington Times put it, “Researchers identified 300 American and/or U.S.-based Islamic State sympathizers who use social media to radicalize new recruits. About one third of those accounts were operated by women.”

The GWU study says, “A handful of studies have attempted to identify the reasons why ISIS’ ideology attracts a growing number of Western women. While some of these motivations are identical to that of their male counterparts (i.e., the search for a personal identity and the desire to build a strict Islamic society), others are specific to women.”

The numbers shouldn’t be surprising. The female jihadi in San Bernardino, Tashfeen Malik, was a thoroughly committed Islamist who helped to inspire her husband, Syed Farook, to join the attack. Malik, a Pakistani, had pledged her
allegiance to Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on Facebook as she and Farook were killing 14 people.

Within days of that attack, three women strapped themselves with explosives and blew themselves up at Lake Chad, killing 27 people and injuring 90. The women were part of the Islamic group Boko Haram, which has already killed about 20,000 people in Nigeria and surrounding countries over the past six years. It is notorious for recruiting women as fighters and for abductions of young girls to serve as sex slaves and future terrorists.

And recently it was reported that two teenage girls, who had fled their native Austria to join ISIS, had become pregnant by the terrorists and were subsequently killed, one in crossfire and the other beaten to death for trying to escape.

According to counterterrorism reports, hundreds of Western young women and girls — up to 10 percent of recruits — are joining Islamic terrorists in the Middle East.

In the United States in 2014, a 19-year-old Somali woman from St. Paul, Minn., snuck away from her parents, flew to Turkey and joined the Islamic State in Syria. At least one other woman is suspected of helping her leave the country.

Another young woman, Shannon Conley, 19, of Colorado, had been recruited online and became engaged to an ISIS jihadi in Syria. She was arrested at Denver International Airport with a one-way ticket and pleaded guilty for trying to travel to the region to join the terrorist organization.

According to researchers at the International Center for the Study of Radicalization at Kings College London, many female recruits hold college degrees and come from well-off backgrounds.

In a particularly notorious case, a former British housewife, Samantha Lewthwaite, joined ISIS in 2014 and is considered one of its most valuable assets. Known as the “Special One” or the “White Widow,” Lewthwaite has been the world’s most-wanted woman since 2013. She is reportedly training an all-woman army of suicide bombers for the Islamic State. Perhaps the Chad bombers were her handiwork.

The main concern for Western law enforcement is that these women may return on their home countries’ passports, come in as “refugees” or as part of a spousal or familial relationship, such as Malik, and launch attacks.
As concerned as we should be about the unique threat posed by these women, however, we should also champion the true heroines in this war, such as the scores of Kurdish women who are battling ISIS as courageously as the men by their sides.

After all, Islamism is both a “war on women” and a “war with women.” And that’s something the civilized world should be united in smashing.

Yellowhammer News: “'We’re at war’ – Alabama mosque reports jihadist messages to FBI”, December 9, 2015

By Cliff Sims

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — A local Muslim leader has informed the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that members of his mosque have received “suspicious messages” on their social media accounts, including at least one message that mentioned “war,” according to an Associated Press report.

Ashfaq Taufique, president of the Birmingham Islamic Society, told the AP that an unknown individual sent friend requests to members of his mosque, followed by messages. One of the messages said, “We are at war and we must stick together.”

Taufique says he informed the FBI out of fear that his mosque would be incorrectly associated with extremists.

“(I reported the messages) because of the special time we are in we didn’t want to take a chance,” he said.

One of the Birmingham Islamic Society’s former members left the United States to join ISIS last year, although the mosque’s leaders say she had withdrawn from the community long before radicalizing.

The girl, Hoda Muthana, a 20-year-old former college student from Hoover, was radicalized through social media and ultimately abandoned her family to move to ISIS-controlled Syria.

A recent study by George Washington University’s Program on Extremism identified Muthana as one of ISIS’s most active recruiters online.
Here’s how the group operates on the Internet, according to the study:

ISIS Activists and sympathizers are active on a variety of platforms — open forums, private messaging apps, and the dark web — but Twitter is by far the platform of choice. The Program on Extremism identified and monitored approximately 300 American supporters of ISIS on Twitter, including some individuals now in Syria and Iraq. These accounts can be divided into three categories: noes, amplifiers and shout-outs.

**NODES:**
Nodes are the leading voices in the ISIS Twittersphere. They enjoy a prominent status and are the primary content creators for the network. A group of two or three clustered users will often swap comedic memes, news articles and official ISIS tweets, allowing them to pool followers and more easily spread content both to new audiences and throughout their network.

**AMPLIFIERS:**
Amplifiers largely do not generate new content but rather retweet and “favorite” material from popular users. Ultimately, because they post little, if any, original content, it is often unclear whether these accounts correspond to real-life ISIS sympathizers or are programmed to post automatically.

**SHOUT-OUTS:**
Shout-out accounts primarily introduce new, pro-ISIS accounts to the community and promote newly created accounts of previously suspended users, allowing them to quickly regain their pre-suspension status. A unique innovation of the online ISIS scene, they tend to have the largest followings in the Twitter landscape and play a pivotal role in the community’s resilience, despite frequent account suspensions.

**CHARACTERS:**
— Nearly 1/3 of the tracked accounts are purportedly operated by women.
— Most American ISIS supporters online communicate in English.
— Many accounts use avatars of black flags, lions and green birds (a symbol of martyrs).
— Increasingly avatars feature Americans arrested on terrorism charges, killed waging jihad abroad, or committing attacks in the U.S.

Muthana is reportedly one of the Islamic State’s “nodes.”

Her father, Mohammed, and his wife moved to the United States from Yemen in 1992. All of his children were born here and are American citizens. He told
Buzzfeed in an in-depth report that he “controls his kids” like “every family,” but that ISIS “found somehow, some way to (get) through” to his daughter.

Epoch Times: “In Digital War Against ISIS, Speed and Counter-Narrative Are Missing”, December 11, 2015

By Amelia Pang

Tumblr, the microblogging platform that is a repository of cat memes, bohemian fashion trends, and esoteric rap quotes, also stores detailed instructions on how to aid the self-declared Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Sometimes, months will pass before Tumblr becomes aware of an ISIS account and suspends the user.

One official ISIS Tumblr account, which posted extensive information on how to fund ISIS or host a fighter in one’s home, remained on Tumblr for at least three months.

According to the Internet Archive, this ISIS Tumblr account existed at least as early as May. In June, Tom Marshall, a Tumblr user, came across the account and reported it to Tumblr as a “propaganda blog for the Islamic State inciting violence and illegal activity.”

Tumblr acknowledged it received his email. But the blog remained online. In July, Marshall followed up with Tumblr via email. Tumblr removed the ISIS blog a few weeks later.

The problem isn’t only on Tumblr. ISIS recruitment accounts appear on Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Vine, YouTube, Reddit, and others. Many of the social networks are slow to remove content that promotes extremist ideology.

An official ISIS app was available on Google Play for three months before Google took it down. The app, called The Dawn of Glad Tidings, connected the personal Twitter accounts of ISIS supporters to ISIS’s communications department. It allowed users who downloaded the app to post automated tweets containing propaganda messages, links, hashtags, and images crafted by ISIS.
It was a sophisticated app that spaced out the tweets in a way that evaded Twitter’s spam-detection algorithm, reported the Atlantic. At one point, the app facilitated 40,000 tweets in one day.

Social networks tend to respond slowly to reports of terrorist accounts because they are restricted by the complex nuances of the legality of censorship, and a lengthy review process for flagged content.

Yet during a time when lone wolf terrorist attacks by people radicalized via the Internet are on the rise, and the number of terror-related arrests in the United States have increased to an unprecedented level since September 2001, some argue that social networks should do more to prevent the dissemination of extremist content online.

Surge in Online Radicalization in the United States

So far in 2015, 56 people have been arrested in the United States for plotting to join or aid ISIS, the largest number of terror-related arrests in a single year since 9/11, according to a report by George Washington University’s Program on Extremism.

There are currently 900 active investigations against ISIS sympathizers covering all 50 states.

As of the fall of 2015, U.S. authorities were aware of 250 Americans who either traveled or attempted to go to Syria or Iraq to join ISIS.

During President Barack Obama’s Oval Office address on Dec. 6 on the changing nature of terrorism since 9/11, he spoke of how perpetrators of the Boston Marathon bombings and the San Bernardino shootings were likely radicalized on the Internet.

“As the Internet erases the distance between countries, we see growing efforts by terrorists to poison the minds of people like the Boston marathon bombers and the San Bernardino killers,” Obama said in his speech.

According to a report from International Center for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) in The Hague, radicalization on the Internet is a very new phenomenon.

For decades, studies have shown that terrorists take several years to go through the various stages of radicalization and needed physical contact with a recruiter before committing violent acts.
It wasn’t until recently that youth radicalization began to occur in much shorter time frames. This is likely a result of easy access to radical content on social networks.

“Clearly, persons looking for confirmation of their ideas will find that the Internet can function as an echo chamber of their already extremist ideology,” the ICC report stated.

Terror on Twitter

One of the most popular places for radicalization on the Internet is Twitter, where terrorists are very well-organized.

Studies estimate there are at least 90,000 Twitter accounts operated by ISIS. Some ISIS accounts are dedicated to generating content. Some are designated to retweeting material, while others are in charge of promoting the new accounts of suspended users.

And there are no effective measures that prevent suspended ISIS members from creating new accounts.

“I’ve seen ISIS accounts with 15,000 followers taken down 17 times. In two to three days, the account is back with 15,000 followers,” said Matthew Costa, a solar energy specialist who looks for ISIS on Twitter in his spare time.

Costa is not a hacker. He is a flagger. Since the summer, Costa has flagged and reported thousands of ISIS accounts. “There’s some big players that have stayed on Twitter for way too long,” he said.

The Counter Extremism Project (CEP), a nonprofit dedicated to combating extremist groups, launched a petition asking Twitter to adopt policies that will make it difficult for suspended extremists to create new accounts.

“When extremists are celebrating their 100th account, your approach isn’t working,” CEP tweeted at Twitter, regarding an ISIS account that touted its 100th return to Twitter.

So far, no new policies have been enacted. But there might be an upside to that.

Erin Saltman, a senior researcher for London think tank the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, said there’s a silver lining to having so many ISIS accounts on major social networks.
The interactions of terrorists on social media can offer intelligence agencies surveillance opportunities.

“It would be worse if these radical conversations move to smaller, unregulated platforms that are hosted in foreign countries,” Saltman said.

ISIS Defectors and Authentic Counter-Narratives

Denying access to extremist narratives can help stagger the spread of radical content, but censorship isn’t the only solution.

Farah Pandith, former special representative to Muslim Communities for the State Department, said there’s a dire need for more authentic counter-narratives on the Internet.

“We are seeing the kind of recruitment for millennials online that is fast paced and moving across many different platforms,” Pandith said on the Brian Lehrer Show. “We do not see the counter to that in any real way.”

“They’re having open conversations in real time in places we can see,” she said. “The tragedy is that we’re seeing this, but there hasn’t been the mobility at scale to compete with the messages of the extremists.”

There’s a need for more diverse and authentic counter-narratives that can plant seeds of doubt in the minds of those who are considering extremist ideology.

But such narratives are difficult to generate and can have the opposite impact if it does not come from an authentic source.

ISIS’s propaganda is complex and diverse, varying from humanitarian intervention, martyrdom, to defending “true” Islam. Their narratives appeal to an individual’s search for identity, life meaning, friendship, romance, and adventure.

Counter-narratives need to be individualized. And different counter-narratives need to reach different people at different stages of radicalization.

The source of the counter-narrative is crucial. Counter-narratives from Western governments can come off as patronizing.

“It’s like saying: ‘You don’t know how to be a Muslim, so we’ll tell you how to be one,’” said Emeric Bernard-Jones, co-founder of the FARO Project. “It’s a delicate issue.”
The FARO Project, which stands for the Fight Against Radicalization Online, is an online campaign that educates people how to identify and report individuals who are at risk of engaging radicalizing.

Many ISIS recruits could have been prevented from leaving for Syria or from participating in a suicide mission if their family members and friends had seen the signs and notified authorities.

The most authentic counter-narrative sources would be former ISIS recruits who have defected, but those are hard to come by.

But not many defect because they’ll be killed if caught, and those who do succeed in leaving likely face prosecution upon returning home.

Still, a few have made it out.

A report from the London-based International Center For the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence studied 58 former ISIS members who explained their reasons for joining and leaving.

Many joined because they believed that Sunni Muslim minorities in Syria and Iraq were in danger of ethnic cleansing. Out of a desire to save their people, they adopted a misguided notion that joining ISIS would be supporting a humanitarian cause.

ISIS’s propaganda claims the Western media is telling lies, and that if they join ISIS they’d live a spiritually meaningful life filled with luxury, love, and friendship.

The defectors became disillusioned by the unrestrained violence they witnessed such as the execution of ISIS members and the killing of women and children. They also saw ISIS killing many Sunni Muslims as well.

They also became disillusioned by the poor standard of living. Many said they found it difficult to cope with electricity shortages, and the cars and luxury living they were promised during recruitment never materialized.

These stories don’t seem to be percolating through in any great volume, however. Until such narratives permeate social media too, it will be difficult for the West to win the digital war against ISIS.
Yahoo! Politics: “ISIS Twitter memes, and what they mean”, December 11, 2015

By Alyssa Bereznak

The Islamic State has a reputation for spreading horrifyingly violent imagery online. But as Seamus Hughes, the co-author of a new report titled “ISIS in America,” discovered, the terrorist organization also appreciates a good meme.

Hughes, the deputy director of George Washington University’s Program on Extremism, spent six months monitoring the small but dedicated ISIS English-language scene on Twitter, documenting what the New York Times calls an “electronic hothouse of mutual support” for the worldwide terrorist organization’s extremist views. During that time, he documented the subculture, which is defined by specific lingo, inside jokes and, of course, plenty of memes.

“It kind of reminded me of any other online community,” he told Yahoo News. “Whether that be Reddit or some other subchannel where everyone generally knows each other.”

The images Hughes provided to Yahoo News — which include references to The Lion King and the Internet-famous honey badger — show that the English speakers who are generating this content are fluent in the pop culture language of young Westerners.

His report found that the average age of the 71 people who have been arrested on ISIS-related charges in America is 26 — and one-third were 21 and under. In other words, many of the English speakers who participate in this online subculture have probably come across a doge photo in their day.

But using memes to communicate signifies more than a demographic in common. According to Limor Shifman, author of the book Memes in Digital Culture, people use memes to both demonstrate their place in a community and express their individual opinions. As a result, exchanging these images often unites individuals from different backgrounds, whether that’s a few Internet dwellers on a 4Chan thread or the far-flung international recruits of a terrorist organization on Twitter.
In using memes to personalize or relate to an idea, members of ISIS may also be able to make the organization’s violent ideologies more palatable, according to Shifman.

“Because many memes are humorous, people can then express opinions that might otherwise be condemned for not being appropriate,” Shifman, who is an associate professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, told Yahoo News. “It helps in slipping messages in that might otherwise not be expected.”

Below, a brief survey of some of the memes Hughes has collected:

The meme “Keep Calm and Carry On” originated in 1939 when it was printed on British public safety posters during World War II. It was revived in the early-aughts in the form of key chains, stickers and Etsy mugs, and people eventually parodied the saying into online oblivion. In this case, baqiya means “remaining” — lingo in the English-language ISIS community to announce a Twitter user’s return to the platform after having his or her account suspended.

Some accounts, referred to as “baqiya accounts,” exist only to alert their followers when certain users have returned. According to Hughes, the latest shout-out account, with the handle “baqiya100,” celebrated its 100th new user with an image of a cake. It, too, was suspended by Twitter Thursday afternoon.
“In religious text, lions are a symbol of bravery,” says Hughes, who notes that many ISIS supporters use lions as avatars. “This is combining the two things of *Lion King* and ISIS together in a particularly Western type of version of this.”

According to Hughes’ report the term “green bird” is a scriptural reference that describes an ISIS member after he or she dies as a martyr and goes to heaven. Jihadists refer to their fallen soldiers as green birds as a way of eulogizing them. Thus the image of an intensely fierce hummingbird.

This meme paraphrases something President Obama said during a November interview with ABC’s George Stephanopoulos and was spread by right-wing blogs like *The Federalist Papers*. Paradoxically, it’s also used by ISIS to gloat. “Some of the people who are uploading this meme are criticizing Obama’s policy,” Shifman explains. “Others are using it to say, ‘Look how strong we are.’ So they’re using the very same template to say very different things.”
Any meme connoisseur recalls the excellent 2011 viral video “The Crazy Nastyass Honey Badger,” which included humorous narration about the admirably courageous pursuits of the native African species. As someone who enjoyed the meme myself, I was particularly startled to see it co-opted for ISIS propaganda. I recognized and understood the cultural reference, and it spoke to me in a way that a pamphlet or image of a beheading did not. When I mentioned to Shifman how disturbed I was by this, she said that’s what makes memes so powerful. “Memes are not used by one group or another,” says Shifman. “They’re becoming this prevalent cultural form that each group uses for its own use.”


By Gerry Feld

There’s no way you can classify the horrific attack in San Bernardino, California at the Inland Regional Center as anything but radical Islamic terrorism. It was cold-blooded murder conducted by two jihadists, Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife Tashfeen Malik, who planned this attack with precision. San Bernardino Police Chief Jarrod Burguan stated, “They came prepared to do what they did, as if they were on a mission.”
The Inland Regional Center was considered a soft target. The military definition of soft targets is an unarmored or undefended target intended to be destroyed. There are millions of soft targets in America and hundreds in St. Cloud, all vulnerable to the same type of assault without warning.

Farook, an employee of the County Health Department, was merciless enough to attend the Christmas party in the conference room before executing 14 of his co-workers and wounding 20.

Patrick Baccari told The Associated Press he was sitting next to Farook before he suddenly disappeared, leaving his coat on the chair. Moments later, he and his wife returned, dressed in full combat gear stuffed with ammunition and cameras. They left behind three explosive devices probably meant to kill law enforcement. They were dedicated to their cause as just two hours before, Malik used Facebook to pledge her allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State.

Their home in Redlands, California. contained massive quantities of guns and ammunition along with homemade bombs, computer drives and cellphones. One FBI agent labeled their home a bomb factory.

People question how a mother of a 6-month-old could commit such an atrocity. Our western mind does not accept such behavior, but those bent on jihad see life differently. Although the Islamic State never took credit, it called the couple supporters of the cause. Factions of the Islamic State celebrated the assault on Twitter using the hashtag, #AmericaBurning.

CNN reported FBI officials discovered links between Farook and known terrorist recruiter Mohammad Hassan on the computer drives. Hassan, a Somali refugee turned American citizen, lived in Minneapolis before returning to Somali in 2007 to join Al-Shabaab. The FBI has been scrutinizing Hassan’s activities for seven years, linking him to organizing a May attack at a convention center in Garland, Texas.

There is good reason to be concerned regarding the strength of the Islamic State in America and those who follow its calling. “ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa,” by Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, states since fall, about 250 Americans traveled to Syria
or Iraq to join the Islamic State while another 900 known sympathizers live in all 50 states. The report points out “while California and Texas suffered from ISIS attacks the highest number of arrests were made in New York and Minnesota.” The FBI points out there were 15 arrests in 2014 and 56 already in 2015.

Even more disturbing is that the U.S. government's background checks required for Malik's visa did not reveal she used false information in her application.

Two government sources told the Los Angeles Times that Malik used the name of a neighborhood or street near her home in Pakistan, rather than her family’s home address. Investigators speculate that she sought to deflect any investigation of her family’s reputed ties to Islamic militants in Punjab. She was issued a K-1 Visa, commonly called a fiance visa in July 2014. In July, she was issued a conditional green card after clearing a Department of Homeland Security audit.

Knowing Malik cleared a Homeland Security check using false credentials must make all of us wary regarding the validity of our refugee resettlement and visa programs. How can we vet 10,000 Syrians if we could not verify one Pakistani?

After attacks such as this everyone wonders, can it happen here? Although large targets bring big news coverage, attacking small targets spreads fear and panic quickly by taking away one's sense of security.

We are a country where most anyone can move without question or background checks. If the San Bernardino attack is the new normal, it’s imperative we become aware of our surroundings. It never hurts to have a plan in mind when venturing into soft targets such as theaters, restaurants or sporting events.

No one wants to live in fear, but being prepared becomes the difference of living or dying. Just ask anyone from Israel!

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Tri-City Herland: "America seriously needs to get a grip", December 12, 2015

By Mary Sanchez
America needs to get a grip.

Since the slaughter of 14 innocents by two radicalized Muslim terrorists in San Bernardino, Calif., common sense has been a collateral casualty. Leading a wave of hysteria has been Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, with his harebrained ideas for denying various civil liberties to Muslims.

None of them would pass constitutional muster, thank goodness, and while his diatribes have found fertile ground among his party’s base, the Republican establishment has begun to push back against Trump.

That’s good sign, because we do have a terrorism problem that requires clear thinking and sober judgment. Our actions and policies must be grounded in accurate and detailed information. A report that received relatively little press at the time of its release in early December deserves a spotlight.

It’s far from comforting. The main message is that there is no snapshot profile to identify the jihadist on the block. That fact alone renders much of the blather we’re hearing about restrictions on this group or that beside the point.

“ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa” is the result of a six-month study by the Program on Extremism at George Washington University. It studied online chatter, arrest data and other information in the cases of the 71 people arrested since March 2014 for crimes related to support of the Islamic State, along with counter-terrorism research. Fifty-six were arrested in 2015, a record number in a single year since the 9/11 attacks.

The report asks a crucial question, in the context of students and others caught heading to Syria, intending to join the Islamic State: “How could these seemingly ordinary young American men and, in growing numbers, women, be attracted to the world’s most infamous terrorist organization?” The answer is that we don’t know, “as each individual’s radicalization has its own unique dynamics.”

Average age of those studied was 26, but they ranged in age from 15 to 47; 86 percent were male, and most were U.S. citizens or permanent residents.

Another point that might surprise those who obsessed with Islamic immigrants: Converts to the faith were 40 percent of the people arrested.
In some ways, the study proved to be a bit prophetic about San Bernardino. It noted a decrease in the numbers traveling to join the Islamic State overseas, which raises the possibility that homegrown terrorists will increasingly focus on U.S. targets.

At less than 1 percent of the total adult population, Muslims in America are at a disadvantage with respect to public perception. Many Americans literally don’t know a single one of the estimated 1.8 million adults in the U.S. who are Muslim.

Assimilation and acceptance, as opposed to isolation, the report notes, are key to blocking radicalization. That’s actually a hopeful point we can look to. Despite the caustic debates about Islam playing out in our media of late, America’s Muslims are far more integrated than their coreligionists in many European countries. That’s a huge strength – and one that should not be undermined.

About 63 percent of Muslims in the U.S. are immigrants. They are also more likely to hold a college degree than native-born citizens, and Muslim women stand out for educational attainment. They’re an asset to our nation, and it’s in everybody’s interest, in the measures we take to protect ourselves from terrorism, not to alienate them.

If American citizens are truly to follow the “if you see something, say something” mode of alertness, we need to be knowledgeable. A mentality of Muslim-equals-terrorist will not help keep us safe.

Here’s a more helpful attitude. How about taking up some of the burden? Read up on the politics and history of the regions and countries where Muslim immigrants and refugees come from, on the conflict now ravaging Syria and Iraq, on the Islamic State and how it is recruiting and how its tactics morph. And get to know more Muslims.

This is an awkward time in our history when Muslim Americans are being expected to speak out after each radical attack, to defend their faith, to denounce bloodshed.

The presumption is offensive.

God forbid if I had to answer for every horrific deed committed by any Latino, or any woman, or any Catholic, or any journalist, or any other member of a group with which I could identify.
That’s a burden that can be lifted from Muslims in America only when the rest of us gain more insight into the faith, its members and the horrific ways that the Islamic State seeks to radicalize.

The Baltimore Sun: “Feds: Edgewood man pledged allegiance to Islamic State, received funds from Egypt”, December 14, 2015

By Ian Duncan

A Harford County man pledged allegiance to the self-proclaimed Islamic State and received thousands of dollars from overseas to carry out an attack, federal prosecutors said Monday.

Mohamed Elshinawy, 30, of Edgewood was arrested Friday on charges of attempting to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization and other offenses, federal prosecutors said.

The criminal complaint filed against Elshinawy lays out extensive communications the FBI says he had with contacts overseas and alleges he received at least $8,700 he believed was from the Islamic State terror group, sometimes called ISIL.

"When confronted by the FBI, he lied in order to conceal his support for ISIL and the steps he took to provide material support to the deadly foreign terrorist organization," Assistant U.S. Attorney General John P. Carlin said in a statement.

"He will now be held accountable for these crimes."

It is not clear in court papers if prosecutors believe the money wired to him was from the terrorist group or from a sympathizer.

Federal authorities have brought charges against dozens of people they say are Islamic State supporters, but terrorism analysts said the allegation that Elshinawy might have received funding from the group is new.

Michael Greenberger, director of the University of Maryland Center for Health and Homeland Security, said the charges represent another example of ISIL’s
reach from its bases in the Middle East and the group's hope to cause mayhem in the United States.

"It appears they have enough money to be able to set out a lot of lures, hoping that one lure will catch somebody who's willing to engage in dangerous activity," Greenberger said.

A couple who investigators believe were inspired by ISIL killed 14 people in a shooting rampage this month at a government facility in San Bernardino, Calif. The group, which controls territory in Syria and Iraq, has claimed responsibility for attacks that have killed scores in Paris, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt.

Elshinawy is the first person to be charged by federal prosecutors in Maryland for alleged ties to the group. It was unclear Monday where he was being held.

No one answered the door Monday afternoon at his address, a townhouse in the 300 block of McCann St. in a neighborhood called Harford Commons, which has several blocks of identical green-and-white one-story homes. A neighbor said she had seen FBI agents in the area but assumed it had to do with drug dealing rather than a terrorism case.

Agents first interviewed Elshinawy in July, after learning about a suspicious $1,000 wire transfer he received from Egypt, according to the criminal complaint.

Elshinawy initially said the money was from his mother before changing his story and admitting he had been in contact with a childhood friend who had been arrested in Egypt on terror charges, an FBI agent wrote in the complaint. The friend had fled to Syria, but Elshinawy said the friend put him in touch with an ISIL operative who sent the money, the FBI says.

Elshinawy said the operative did not give him any guidance on how to carry out an attack but cited the shooting at a contest featuring cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in Garland, Texas, as an example, according to the FBI. Two gunmen opened fire outside the contest in May.

Elshinawy contended he was really conning the ISIL operative — including concocting a plot to make it look as though he sold printers on eBay to provide cover for PayPal transfers — and did not plan to do anything.

"Rather, he claimed he saw an opportunity to make money and take it from 'thieves,' and felt that the FBI should reward him for what he had done," the agent wrote.
As they probed further, the investigators wrote that they concluded that wasn’t true. They say Elshinawy had pledged allegiance to ISIL on social media, had discussed making an explosive device and traveling to live in ISIL-controlled territory, and had concealed how much money he had received.

It’s not clear from the court document what connection the contact — who is not identified in the court papers — had with ISIL. Seamus Hughes, who studies ISIL at George Washington University, said the lack of a clear plot suggests the contact was not a core member of the terrorist group.

U.S. Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein said the case shows how terrorists exploit technology to find recruits and attempt to communicate in secret.

"Federal agents and prosecutors are working tirelessly and using every available lawful tool to disrupt their evil schemes," he said.

While the case shows some similarities with others where authorities allege people have been radicalized by reading online propaganda, Hughes said the allegations also show how personal connections — like a childhood friend — can lead someone down a path to extremism.

"Real-world relationships matter," said Hughes, a former counterterrorism official. "You’re more likely to be engaged in this ideology if your friends, or your brother, or your sister are also interested."

The FBI said that after he was interviewed in July, Elshinawy took steps to make it look as if he had cut off communication with his childhood friend. But as they probed his electronic communications, investigators said, they traced a web of email accounts, cellphone numbers and social media platforms that Elshinawy had used to discuss terrorism.

Writing in Arabic, Elshinawy told the friend on Feb. 17 that he had pledged allegiance to ISIL, the FBI said, and in April told him he had many targets in mind.

"Elshinawy also told his childhood friend that he was indebted to him for showing him the way to martyrdom, and that the childhood friend should continue to fight," the FBI agent wrote.

By Meghan Mitchum

Today, to join a terrorist movement, you don’t need to become a member of an organization. As the New York Times’ David Brooks writes, you just need to be one of their Twitter followers.

Earlier this month, in the aftermath of the Paris terrorist attacks, the George Washington University Program on Extremism released a report on ISIS’ use of social media to recruit extremist followers. The report, “ISIS: From Retweets to Raqqa,” used 71 case studies of FBI targeted, extremist individuals in the United States and looked at emerging trends in demographics and social media platforms.

The demographic findings showed that the average age of ISIS recruits was 26, with one-third of the cases involving recruits 21 years old or younger. 61 individuals were male; 10 were female. The tempo of ISIS arrests has increased, with 56 of these 71 individuals arrested. In total, the FBI has 900 open investigations in all 50 states, the largest number of extremist terrorist activities since 9/11.

In total, the GW report examined more than 300 accounts of people believed to have a connection to ISIS. As the findings reveal, after becoming a Twitter follower, individuals are groomed online and eventually move from open to more secure platforms. From there, ISIS acts as a “travel agent” for individuals who want to join ISIS abroad, providing contacts to call when recruits arrive, detailing which items to bring, and instructing on what to say when crossing into Syria. Likewise, recruiters can use Twitter to encourage followers to attack at home.

Google Executive Chairman Eric Schmidt recently spoke about the need to guard against social media’s tendency to create echo chambers where individuals whose ideas deviate from the main message are ousted from the community. The Internet breeds tribalism, which can help push positive social change. But in the case of ISIS, this means followers can quarantine themselves, interacting only with extremist content and users. Schmidt suggests:
“We should build tools to help de-escalate tensions on social media — sort of like spell-checkers, but for hate and harassment. We should target social accounts for terrorist groups like the Islamic State, and remove videos before they spread, or help those countering terrorist messages to find their voice.”

Schmidt’s outspokenness on this is cardinal. Support from the private sector (and directly from social media companies like Facebook, Twitter, and Google) is exactly what the House Homeland Security Committee called for in its “Rise to Radicalism” hearing in November. The sort of material that can be found on ISIS sites is forbidden by these companies’ policies, but closer partnerships between social media companies, DHS, FBI, law enforcement and other stakeholders may be essential in monitoring and closing these accounts. Of course, “spell-checkers for hate and harassment” is the sort of phrase that could foster backlash from groups worried about First Amendment rights. But a concentrated effort on ISIS accounts could curtail this issue, especially if private sector aid is voluntary, as Schmidt seems to suggest.

While Schmidt and others seek remedies, some are taking direct action online. The hacker collective Anonymous dubbed last Friday, “International Trolling Day,” launching a fight-fire-with-fire campaign in which Anonymous calls for the online insulting and harassment of ISIS, using tags like #ISISTrollingDay, #Daesh and #Daeshbag, as well as a collection of spirited memes.

So we have hackers, Internet companies, law enforcement, intelligence and a host of other stakeholders rallying to action. They recognize the threat from the ISIS message. Leaving Anonymous aside, this is a chance for the private sector and Congress to band together. So why have we not seen a more proactive solution?

FBI Director James Comey said the tech industry not allowing government access to Twitter is not a tech issue; it’s a business decision. But Schmidt and others in the Valley are working towards solutions and calling for partnership. It’s a moment for Congress to inject some much needed leadership and not through talking points on their Twitter accounts. With voters putting terrorism as a priority over the economy, constituents are completely on board with action, leaving Congress no excuse to do nothing. It’s time to act and do more than just tweet about it.

By Damiam Paletta and Siobhan Hughes

WASHINGTON—The Department of Homeland Security is working on a plan to expand scrutiny of social-media posts as part of its visa application process before certain people are allowed to enter the country, a person familiar with the matter said.

The move is part of a new focus on the use of social-networking sites following the shooting rampage in San Bernardino, Calif., two weeks ago.

Currently, DHS looks at postings by visa applicants only intermittently, as part of three pilot programs that began in earnest earlier this year. It is unclear how quickly a new process could be implemented, and other details couldn’t be learned.

Investigators are looking for clues in Facebook posts, computer records and elsewhere that may have hinted at the intentions of Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik, the married couple suspected of killing 14 people at a holiday gathering Dec. 2 before dying in a shootout with police.

Ms. Malik lived most of her life in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia but moved to the U.S. in 2014 on a K-1 visa, offered to those engaged to Americans. The day of the shooting, she pledged allegiance to the leader of Islamic State, law-enforcement officials have said, on a Facebook account registered to a pseudonym. Counterterror officials are looking to see if she made similar postings in the past.

Islamic State and other terrorist groups have used social media to communicate with one another and seek converts. Intelligence, law-enforcement and counterterrorism officials have spent years trying to unearth clues about attacks in such postings.

The House of Representatives on Tuesday will vote on a bill to require the Obama administration to come up with a comprehensive strategy to combat terrorists’ use of social media. Under the measure, the White House would have to inform Congress about the social-media training it provides law-enforcement officials.
That bill is the latest to respond to public anxiety following the San Bernardino killings, which investigators believe could have been inspired by Islamic State propaganda fueled by social media. House Republicans have worked to advance several bills since the rampage that aim to show they are taking concrete steps to address Americans’ security concerns.

Rep. Michael McCaul (R., Texas), chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, said the DHS move is overdue. “It is time this administration stopped worrying about the privacy of foreigners more than the security of Americans,” he said.

Separately, congressional negotiators were looking at including in a fiscal 2016 spending bill a measure to impose new curbs on travel by citizens who live in one of the 38 countries that enjoy expedited travel clearance to the U.S.

The measure, which passed the House last week, would require any citizen of the 38 countries who traveled to Iraq, Syria, Iran or Sudan in the past five years to obtain a visa, a time-consuming process requiring an in-person interview. People who are citizens of both one of the 38 favored countries and of one of the four flagged countries would also have to obtain a visa.

The pilot programs for social media used by DHS don’t sweep up all posts. Officials have kept details of the programs closely held as they don’t want to reveal their process for identifying threats.

“The department is actively considering additional ways to incorporate the use of social media review in its various vetting programs,” spokeswoman Marsha Catron said. “The department will continue to ensure that any use of social media in its vetting programs is consistent with current law and appropriately takes into account civil rights and civil liberties and privacy protections.”

The State Department, which also plays a role in processing visa applications, is currently reviewing how it might increase scrutiny of social-media postings going forward.

Ms. Malik entered the U.S. before the pilot programs began, and it is unclear whether they would have stopped her. She is believed to have used a false name or nickname on her Facebook account, though it was connected to her personal email address.

Experts said the DHS program would need to be carefully crafted, given the range of online sources and social-media sites. “It absolutely needs to be done,
but there needs to be clear guidelines about what is of concern and what is not,” said Lorenzo Vidino, director of the program on extremism at George Washington University.

He said that typically U.S. immigration officials search international databases and check with foreign governments when reviewing someone’s visa application, and a new program could add valuable information. “Here we are talking a 10-minute Google search which can yield a lot of good leads,” he said.

Law-enforcement and counterterrorism officials already use social-media postings to decide whether to add someone to a no-fly list, and that information is relayed to immigration officials before visas are granted. Ms. Malik’s past social-media use didn’t attract the kind of attention that would have her added to these lists, people familiar with the matter said.

Using social media as part of each visa application would present a number of challenges. DHS would have to decide whether to focus on countries considered higher risk, such as Syria and Yemen.

They would also need translators who can understand the difference between political musings and violent threats. And, perhaps even more problematic, many social-media accounts have privacy settings that would impede government scrutiny.

The U.S. government issued 531,463 immigrant and nonimmigrant visas from foreign service posts in the year that ended Sept. 30.

A Facebook spokesman said the company already works to notify law enforcement of certain activity on its site. The company didn’t have a specific comment on the planned visa application changes.

“Facebook has zero tolerance for terrorists, terror propaganda, or the praising of terror activity and we work aggressively to remove it as soon as we become aware of it,” a spokesman said. “If we become aware of a threat of imminent harm or a planned terror attack, our terms permit us to provide that information to law enforcement and we do.”

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Recode: “U.S. Enlists College Students to Fight ISIS Online”, December 15, 2015

By Kurt Wagner and Dawn Chmielewski

Hoda Muthana’s spiritual awakening happened three years before the 20-year-old American boarded a plane for Turkey in November, 2014, to join ISIS. At 17, the quiet girl from a conservative household in a suburb of Birmingham, Alabama, began distancing herself from the local Muslim community and her friends. She watched hours of scholar lectures on Islam on YouTube, created an alter-ego on Twitter and gained thousands of followers.

On the pretense of going to Atlanta for a college field trip, Muthana boarded a flight to Turkey and made her way to Syria. She married a foreign fighter and
continued to propagate ISIS’s message online from her new home in Raqqa — including one post earlier this year that incited violence.

“Veterans, Patriot, Memorial etc Day parades … go on drive by’s + spill all of their blood or rent a big truck n drive all over them. Kill them.”

Muthana’s story, reported by BuzzFeed and recounted in a new report from George Washington University’s Program on Extremism, “ISIS in America,” documents an alarming but familiar pattern in the rise of homegrown radicalism and the role of online social networks as a “radicalization echo chamber.”

To counter the Islamic State’s powerful online propaganda operation, the Obama administration has been ramping up efforts, including funding one little-known initiative that encourages college students to create anti-terrorism campaigns to share on sites like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

The program, called Peer to Peer: Challenging Extremism, is a partnership between the U.S. departments of State and Homeland Security, Facebook and EdVenture Partners, a third-party consulting firm that runs the operation domestically and abroad. It is a competition that challenges millennials to create social or digital campaigns to counter violent extremism and hate speech.

Its goal is to use the very social media platforms where extremist groups like the Islamic State recruit new members to offer a different perspective. The organizers hope that the digitally savvy college students taking part in the Peer to Peer program can employ the same digital tricks of the trade to reach those at risk of being seduced by the camaraderie or sense of adventure or purpose that groups like ISIS promise.

“The problem and the issue I’m concerned with the most is the recruitment and radicalization of young people, specifically in the United States, into the violent [terrorist groups],” said George Selim, director for the Office for Community Partnerships at the Department of Homeland Security. “Young people are such a credible voice on this issue.”

The urgency of such an initiative can hardly be overstated. One of the shooters in the San Bernardino attack that left 14 people dead and 21 others injured posted a pledge of allegiance to ISIS on Facebook around the time the rampage began. FBI Director James Comey told Congress that the couple were discussing jihad and martyrdom online before they became engaged and married.
The issue of terrorism is dominating the 2016 presidential race, with Democratic presidential front-runner Hillary Clinton saying the nation’s technology companies need to do more to “deprive jihadists of virtual territory” online. Lawmakers resurrected a bill that would require tech companies like Facebook and Twitter to report online terrorist activity following the mass shooting in San Bernardino.

That’s easier said than done, particularly for Twitter, which the George Washington University report identified as the platform of choice for ISIS propagandists. Removing one account simply spurs the creation of another to take its place in an endless game of digital whack-a-mole. Completely stamping out terrorist accounts is nearly impossible given how quick and easy it is to sign up on these platforms.

Facebook and Twitter don’t go proactively searching for this kind of content, either. Instead, they wait until it is reported by another user — though both companies say they respond aggressively once they’re alerted to a threat or to a user promoting terrorism. Facebook, for example, will look for associated accounts and inappropriate content related to a flagged account, but only after it has already been reported.

These “wait and react” strategies frustrate those who demand more proactive intervention, just as social networks deal with child pornography. A Change.org petition asking Facebook to proactively stifle terrorist-like content has amassed more than 145,000 signatures.

The Peer to Peer initiative provides Facebook with a middle ground for dealing with terror-related content online, one that falls somewhere between exerting heavy-handed censorship of its 1.5 billion users and waiting for people to report a problem.

Counter Programming

“You can’t base a whole religion on a few bad seeds.”

This was the mindset that inspired Julie Himelstein, a senior at the University of Maryland, to get involved in Peer to Peer almost one year ago. Her project, Islam Rooted, was a multi-part documentary to “challenge misconceptions about Islam’s relationship with Western Education.” Himelstein, a 23-year-old Baltimore native, said she grew up with a diverse group of friends, many of whom were Muslim, and was sick of the stereotypes projected on the religion.
“When I hear about all these extremist actions and groups on an international level, it leaves me distraught because I know so many amazing people in the Muslim community,” she said. “I wanted to get this message out.”

This was also the motivation of Hagar Ittia, a 29-year-old graduate student at Maryland who was not part of Himelstein’s seven-person team, but was a subject in the documentary to share her experience as a Muslim American.

“The dominant image of Muslims in the American psyche is very skewed,” Ittia explained. Two tropes of Muslim Americans dominate: The radicalized, anti-American Muslim, and the Muslim who has completely rejected the Middle East and has fully embraced Western ideals. “I don’t feel like either one of them is very representative of the majority of Muslims in America, and it’s certainly not representative of me.”

“Participating in this documentary allowed me to diversify the conversation a little bit,” she added.

Over the course of 15 weeks, competing student groups from the program generate anti-terrorism campaigns either online or offline. Organizers call the campaigns “counter-speech,” designed to challenge hate speech and extremism by offering another perspective. The campaigns range from thoughtful to comical to borderline offensive.

Projects ran the gamut: 52Jumaa, a mobile app designed for young Muslims to promote positive personal and spiritual growth; a series of short video documentaries; a website called “Funny Militant,” where people could submit memes and cartoons “delegitimizing and discrediting ISIS.”

“The model here,” said Selim, “is to let a thousand flowers bloom.”

As part of the program, Facebook holds workshops to show students how best to use its platform to amplify their campaigns and how to take advantage of the insights it provides to site creators to determine which posts resonate with the sought-after demographic. The format of the message matters — generally, photos get shared more quickly than verbose posts. Constructive posts that encourage people to think, rather than those that launch into attacks, tend to gain wider circulation. Even the speaker matters.

“Counter-speech is a powerful tool for amplifying those messages and driving social progress,” said Facebook global policy chief Monika Bickert, citing similar efforts to combat bullying or protest the 2014 kidnapping of Nigerian
schoolgirls by the extremist group Boko Haram. “When it comes to religious extremism, it’s no different. Facebook can be a great place to share what’s in the news, critically discuss it and make sure people ask questions about what they’ve seen.”

What Facebook won’t do is game the system. The company is adamant that it doesn’t use its News Feed algorithm to help boost any anti-terrorism material. Any success the teams have happens organically. “We are not the creators of speech,” Bickert said. “We are not pushing content towards people.”

The idea for Peer to Peer started with a phone call in October 2014 from Selim, who at the time was director of community partnerships for the White House National Security Council. He wanted to reach millennials on digital platforms, but recognized traditional government approaches wouldn’t fly. So he contacted EdVenture CEO Tony Sgro, who had worked with the FBI and Homeland Security on previous projects.

Rather than tap marketing types to craft campaigns, the group wanted to create something that the audience would find authentic. “You could get an ad agency or a public relations firm to come up with the campaign, but you’re basically getting a Madison Avenue perspective. We don’t want Madison Avenue here,” Sgro said. “We want youthful, raw, credible, authentic, social media strategies. The government can’t do that.”

The program’s organizers object to characterizing it as a different kind of propaganda. They emphasize that the students pick their own projects and the government has no say over the material. Dr. Nick Joyce, a Maryland professor who advised Himelstein’s team, described the U.S. government’s involvement as “minimal” — primarily providing the prompt and a little funding.

“I don’t think at any point they felt like government shills, because the project was theirs,” he said.

The U.S. government spent a modest $1 million to fund the program in 2015; it’s wrapping up its second session with 45 teams competing, 20 of those at international schools, in places like Morocco and Kazakhstan.

Each student team receives $2,000 to use on its campaign provided by agencies like the U.S. State Department, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Defense. The winning team at the end of each semester is then awarded a trip — fully funded by Facebook — to show off its campaign to officials in Washington, D.C.
In the first half of 2015, students from Missouri State University took the top prize for their campaign, called One95, intended to educate people about violent extremism. It included a website, multiple testimonial videos and a tweet-a-thon. In total, the group turned its $2,000 into almost 200,000 Facebook and Twitter impressions alone and led to the launch of the One95 Global Youth Summit Against Violent Extremism held this fall at the United Nations in New York.

“If you calculate the amount of positive media impressions that all the schools have generated ... the price we’re paying is minuscule,” explained Selim. “It’s a home run of an investment.”

Not every project has that kind of influence, of course. The Maryland team said that fewer than 50 people saw their documentary at the group’s screening. But that doesn’t mean it was a waste of effort.

“There are lots of people who might classify as lone wolf terrorists, who are disaffected and looking for a narrative to buy into,” said Joyce. “No single project is going to save the world or end terrorism. But these individual projects might have some minor effects along the way that accumulate into something greater.”

Added Himelstein: “All it takes is one really, really great idea to make this so successful that it could make a huge change in the bigger picture.”

Foreign Media

Video/broadcast/podcast

Al-Jazeera: Interview, December 1, 2015


Voz de America: “Mujeres de ISIS en EE.UU.,” December 3, 2015

Articles
Corriere della Sera: “Operazioni sotto copertura e niente prevenzione: cosi l’Fbi combatte Isis”, December 1, 2015

By Marta Serafini


Numeri e condizioni economiche

Dopo gli attentati di Parigi molto si è discusso dei foreign fighters, i combattenti stranieri che Isis ha reclutato e sta reclutando in tutto il mondo. A seconda della provenienza geografica tuttavia il profilo tipo cambia, così come diverse sono le cifre. Ora uno studio, appena pubblicato dal Program on Extremism della George Washington University, ha analizzato le caratteristiche di 71 reclute americane. E se 56 di queste sono state arrestate nell’ultimo anno, il numero più alto dopo l’11 settembre, la maggior parte di loro è di sesso maschile, residente negli Stati Uniti e con un età media di 26 anni. Cifre dunque che non sono per niente lontane dai dati forniti dal Ministero degli Interni italiano che ha parlato di recente di 83 combattenti italiani. «Per certi versi il panorama jihadista italiano e statunitense si assomigliano molto», spiega Lorenzo Vidino esperto di terrorismo e autore con Seamus Hughes del rapporto. Oltre i numeri («che sono in entrambi gli scenari molto bassi») ad accomunare è anche «la mancanza di un ambiente salafita che crea l’ambiente adatto per reclutare». Siamo lontani dunque anni luce dal Belgio e dalla Francia, dove gli ambienti radicali forniscono terreno fertile alla propaganda jihadista. «Sia negli Stati Uniti che in Italia i ragazzi si auto reclutano per lo più su internet ma poi difficilmente trovano
figure di riferimento nel mondo reale che permettano loro di continuare il percorso di radicalizzazione», continua Vidino, autore anche di un libro sui foreign fighters italiani. Lo scenario socio economico tuttavia è completamente diverso. «In Italia non abbiamo politiche di integrazione. Negli Usa invece la famiglia musulmana media ha un reddito più alto della media americana, vive nei bei quartieri». Difficile dunque che sia il malcontento a fare scattare la molla della radicalizzazione.

Internet non basta

Nonostante ciò, che si tratti del Mississippi, delle valli del bresciano dove è cresciuto il marocchino Anas El Abboubi, o dell’hinterland milanese da cui è partita Maria Giulia aka Fatima, l’indottrinamento sembra avvenire per lo più in rete. Anche il report del Program on Extremism, come altre ricerche condotte in Gran Bretagna, parla di profili Twitter di propaganda gestiti in larga parte dalle donne. Ma si tratta di un meccanismo che sfocia nel reclutamento solo se intervengono anche figure reali. «Attenzione a pensare che si possa diventare jihadisti solo guardando qualche sito o qualche account. Sono necessari anche una serie di contatti che è più facile trovare in quei paesi dove i gruppi salafiti sono più potenti», avverte Vidino. Differenze si riscontrano anche nei metodi usati per combattere il fenomeno. A livello investigativo negli Usa l’Fbi che al momento ha 900 investigazioni attive su sospetti affiliati a Isis agisce infatti spesso attraverso “sting operations”, ossia operazioni ordite per cogliere sul fatto l’indagato. Questo metodo è meno utilizzato in Europa mentre in Svezia è addirittura vietato. Ma Stati Uniti e Italia sono accomunati da un altro elemento: «entrambi i governi non fanno prevenzione, dato anche lo scarso numero di foreign fighters».

Il Foglio: “Il mediatore Obama rassicura Erdogan e invoca il nemico commune”, December 1, 2015

By Maria Ferraresi

New York. Con l’incontro di Parigi, durante la Conferenza in cui le cose importanti succedono a margine, Barack Obama ha fatto un passo verso Recep
Tayyip Erdogan. Un passo simbolico e retorico che non cambia la sostanza della missione obamiana in questo frangente, gettare acqua sul fuoco fra Russia e Turchia per tornare a occuparsi del nemico prioritario, lo Stato islamico, ma va oltre la sorvegliatissima posizione articolata dal dipartimento di stato alla vigilia degli incontri con le parti in causa. Foggy Bottom non era andata oltre l’ammissione della violazione dello spazio da parte del Su-24 russo. Obama ha difeso “il diritto della Turchia a difendere se stessa e il suo spazio aereo” mentre il segretario generale della Nato, James Stoltenberg, benediceva a nome dell’alleanza la decisione dei turchi di non presentare a Mosca alcuna scusa per l’abbattimento del jet al confine con la Siria, come richiesto da Vladimir Putin.


Le prime ricostruzioni, confermate dalle autorità locali, dicono che si trattava di una “pipe bomb” artigianale. I media locali parlano di almeno cinque feriti. Erdogan ha incassato le rassicurazioni dell’alleato americano e in conferenza stampa si è attenuto al registro conciliante promosso da Obama nella trasferta parigina: “Stiamo cercando soluzioni diplomatiche, vogliamo evitare tensioni”, ha detto, per risolvere una crisi che “danneggia entrambi i paesi”, mitigando così lo scambio di accuse a distanza con Putin sui traffici di petrolio con lo Stato islamico, che vedrebbero, secondo il Cremlino, anche il coinvolgimento del figlio del presidente turco.

Da Obama, Erdogan ha anche ottenuto una presa di posizione netta sull’impegno intermittente e selettivo, più agitato a parole che praticato, della Russia contro lo Stato islamico. L’aviazione russa si concentra quasi esclusivamente sui gruppi di opposizione ad Assad. “Non mi aspetto di vedere
un cambiamento di strategia della Russia nelle prossime settimane”, ha detto il presidente americano, che ha aggiunto: “Non dobbiamo illuderci che la Russia cominci a colpire soltanto obiettivi di Isis. Non sta succedendo. Non è mai successo. Non succederà nelle prossime settimane”.

Dalle parole di martedì sembra sempre più ampio il fossato che divide Washington e Mosca sul destino di Bashar el Assad: mantenerlo al potere è ancora l’obiettivo principale della Russia, secondo l’analisi americana, e la “shuttle diplomacy” di François Hollande non ha persuaso Putin a concentrare i suoi sforzi militari contro il Califfato. Il sogno di una coalizione “grande e unita” per sconfiggere il nemico è stato rimpiazzato da quello che un funzionario americano chiama con opportuno understatement “una specie di convergenza”.

E in questa specie di convergenza Obama, leader “from behind”, si trova nel ruolo di mediatore delle controversie interne, esercita le arti della pacificazione dei conflitti fra partner riottosi e lascia che siano altri a occuparsi della parte attiva del reclutamento degli alleati. Il primo ministro britannico, David Cameron, ha fissato per oggi il dibattito parlamentare su un’azione militare. Secondo Cameron c’è un “crescente sostegno” per un’azione che considera non soltanto moralmente giusta ma “fondamentale per la sicurezza nazionale”.

La difesa interna è anche la sottotrama delle operazioni diplomatiche di Obama. Come ha detto il consigliere Ben Rhodes, la priorità per la Casa Bianca rimane “affrontare la minaccia immediata del terrorismo per proteggere il popolo americano”, e in questa direzione va il provvedimento che aumenta i controlli per chi viaggia negli Stati Uniti con un passaporto europeo.

Uno studio pubblicato dalla George Washington University intitolato “Isis in America: from retweets to Raqqa” analizza i documenti legati a oltre quattrocento simpatizzanti americani dello Stato islamico, alla ricerca se non di un profilo preciso almeno di tratti comuni per orientare le operazioni antiterroreismo. Ma il profilo del terrorista americano avvinto dalle promesse del Califfato sembra introvabile: “Si va dal militante inflessibile alle teenager, dai criminali minori agli studenti del college”, dice Lorenzo Vidino, direttore del

Onet: “W USA ok. 900 dochodzen ws. Sympatykow Państwa Islamskiego”, December 1, 2015

Raport zatytułowany "From Retweets to Raqqa" (Rakka to miasto w Syrii uznawane za stolicę Państwa Islamskiego) jest analizą sympatyków IS w Stanach Zjednoczonych, których liczbę FBI szacuje "na setki, jeśli nie tysiące osób".

"Choć nie jest ich tak wielu jak na Zachodzie Europy, to mobilizacja IS w USA ma bezprecedensowy charakter" - piszą autorzy raportu, którzy przeanalizowali ponad 300 przypadków osób już zidentyfikowanych przez władze jako rekruci bądź sympatycy IS. Główne kontaktują się oni z organizacją, która ogłosiła kalifat w Syrii i Iraku, za pomocą mediów społecznościowych, a zwłaszcza Twittera. Są w wieku od 15 do 47 lat. Chociaż większość tych sympatyków IS "nigdy nie przejdzie od słów do czynów", to niektórzy ulegają radykalizacji w sieci na tyle, że klawiaturę komputera zamieniają na walkę o charakterze militarnym.

Dotychczas władze USA podawały, że do jesieni tego roku około 250 Amerykanów wyjechało bądź próbowało wyjechać do Syrii lub Iraku, by walczyć w szeregach Państwa Islamskiego. Służby prowadzą obecnie 900 dochodzeń w sprawie sympatyków IS w USA we wszystkich 50 stanach. 71 osób oskarżono od marca 2014 roku o działalność powiązaną z IS, a w 2015 roku aresztowano już 56 osób, czyli więcej niż aresztowano z związku z terroryzmem w jakimkolwiek roku po zamachach z 11 września 2001 roku.

Wśród tych, którzy zostali oskarżeni, przeciętny wiek to 26 lat. Aż 86 procent z nich to mężczyźni. Ponad połowa próbowała wyjechać za granicę, a 27 proc. było w jakiś sposób związane z przygotowywaniem spisków lub przeprowadzaniem ataków na terenie USA. Największe oskarżono w stanach Nowy Jork i Minnesota. Do tej pory niewielu Amerykanów zginęło angażując się w działalność IS: trzech na terenie USA, a co najmniej 12 za granicą.
Autorzy raportu piszą, że sympatyści IS w USA bardzo różnią się zarówno pod względem motywacji, jak i demografii. Niektórzy pochodzą z miast, inni z terenów wiejskich; są wśród ich kryminaliści, ale też studenci uniwersytetów, nastrojentnie dziewczyny oraz silnie zainspirowani przesłaniem IS bojownicy. 
"Niektórzy chcą dołączyć do samozwańczego kalifatu na terenach kontrolowanych przez IS, inni planują ataki w USA - napisał we wstępie do raportu jego współautor Lorenzo Vidino. - To rosnący i niepokojący fenomen".

A ponieważ "nie ma standardowego profilu rekrutacji", to, jak piszą autorzy raportu, nie ma też "jednego panaceum", by jej przeciwdziałać. "Uznanie tej złożoności jest niezbędnym pierwszym krokiem dla polityków, funkcjonariuszy organów ścigania, liderów społecznych, nauczycieli i krewnych, którzy szukają skutecznych rozwiązań" - głosi raport.


L’université de Georges Washington a publié une étude appelée Program on Extremism avec un rapport qui détaille le profil des Américains qui ont rejoint Daesh au cours des dernières années. L’étude s’est porté sur les comptes de réseaux sociaux et les dossiers de justice sur près de 400 citoyens Américains qui ont été recruté par l’État Islamique. Selon Lorenzo Vidino, directeur de ce programme : Des citoyens américains ont toujours rejoint des groupes terroristes, mais le niveau de recrutement et de sensibilisation avec Daesh est sans précédent.

Le profil des Américains qui ont rejoint Daesh

Quelques détails sur le profil type des Américains qui ont rejoint l’État Islamique:

- La moyenne d’âge est de 26 ans
- 50 % ont tenté de voyager à l’étranger
- 40 % se sont converti à l’Islam
- 14 % étaient des femmes

Ce rapport a étudié 7 000 pages de poursuites judiciaires portant sur 71 Américains qui ont été arrêté pour leurs activités liées à Daesh. Ce rapport
nous montre que le profil des recrues est très variable. On a des personnes de
toutes races, de classes sociales ou de religions. Et on voit la même diversité
dans la motivation de ces Américains qui ont été recruté par ISIS. Les Etats de
New York et du Minnesota comptent parmi le plus grand nombre de recrues.

Le Dr Vidino a déclaré : Au delà de la diversité des profils, on a été stupéfait par
la variété des origines. On a des personnes qui vivent dans les grandes villes,
d’autres dans des petites villes rurales de moins de 1 000 habitants. On a des
vétérans de l’armée américaine, des adolescentes qui sont encore au lycée, des
criminels de petite envergure ainsi que des étudiants d’université.

Certaines de ses recrues voulaient partir en Syrie ou en Irak pour combattre,
mais d’autres ont déclaré qu’ils voulait lancer des attaques aux Etats-Unis. Avec
une telle diversité de profils, il est difficile de distinguer le vrai du faux et
surtout, la lutte devient extrêmement difficile contre la propagande d’ISIS si
elle peut toucher des personnes de tous horizons.

L’Etat Islamique et ses partisans exploitent les réseaux sociaux pour
communiquer et recruter. Le niveau d’interaction est maximal et parfois, ces
personnes ne cachent pas leurs activités et elles sont fières d’afficher leur
appartenance à Daesh. Les organisations terroristes utilisaient déjà les réseaux
sociaux pour la propagande, mais l’Etat Islamique l’a propulsé à un autre
niveau avec des recrutements à la clé.

Askanews: “Negli Stati Uniti e allarme per jihadisti ‘made in Usa’”,
December 2, 2015

New York, 2 dic. (askanews) - “Il problema più grande per la lotta contro l’Iisis
negli Stati Uniti è quello endogeno: persone nate qui, con passaporto
americano che si sono radicalizzate. Negli ultimi due o tre anni sia gli attentati
legati all’Iisis che quelli non legati a Isis, ma di matrice jihadista, arrivano da
soggetti che sono americani, se non nati, cresciuti negli Stati Uniti”. Lo ha detto
ad askanews Lorenzo Vidino, autore di "Iisis in America. From Retweets to
Raqqa”, uno studio pubblicato dalla George Washington University sulle attività
e sulle possibili minacce del gruppo dello Stato islamico in America.
Vidino - che dirige il Program on Extremism dell’ateneo di Washington ed è autore di diversi libri sull’estremismo di matrice jihadista - ha poi parlato della questione dei rifugiati e delle possibili infiltrazioni di miliziani dell’Iris negli Stati Uniti: "Se si guarda il trend del passato, il legame non è forte ed è più o meno la stessa cosa che succede in Europa. Nello studio abbiamo guardato alle 71 persone arrestate [dal marzo 2014 ad oggi, ndr.] e neppure uno ha un background da rifugiato, la maggior parte sono persone nate e cresciute in America".

Vidino ha sottolineato come su oltre 250 persone arrestate dall’11 settembre 2001 al 2015, solo "due erano rifugiati, due iracheni nel Kentucky, qualche anno fa. Detto ciò è chiaro che è un problema potenziale di difficoltà nel controllare il background di soggetti che arrivano esiste ma il tema deve essere visto in maniera equilibrata", ha detto mettendo in luce come la questione sia stata estremizzata da parte del partito repubblicano e dei candidati alle primarie.

Un altro elemento da non sottovalutare secondo Vidino sono i foreign fighters che potrebbero rientrare in Usa e compiere un attacco. "Osserviamo la stessa dinamica che vediamo in Europa. Solo che in America è in scala ridotta”. Il ricercatore della George Washington University ha ricordato come anche se il livello di attenzione è molto alto e "ci sono strumenti normativi molto forti e aggressivi, la grande difficoltà è capire quali sono le vere minacce, capire quando un jihadista dalla tastiera passa all’azione".

Vidino ha poi concluso sostenendo che il vero cambiamento deve arrivare dalla risoluzione della guerra in Siria e in Iraq. "In America manca l’altro pezzo del puzzle che è quello di riuscire a risolvere il conflitto siriano-iracheno. Non dico che sparirebbe il jihadismo in America, ma diminuirebbe di molto visto che la grande attrazione è proprio il califfato".


The U.S. has arrested more than 50 individuals in 2015 for links to Daesh, according to a report released Tuesday.

George Washington University examined social media accounts and legal documents of Americans who sympathize with the militant group and who are charged with recruiting for the group.
"ISIS and its supporters are adept at using social media to radicalize and recruit Americans," said Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the school’s Program on Extremism, in a written statement.

"A small number of Americans have whole-heartedly embraced their new-found ISIS support system online. The bar for Americans to join these terrorist organizations has been lowered, allowing a level of connectivity and interaction with recruiters and propagandists unheard of just a few years ago," according to the report.

The majority of U.S.-based Daesh supporters on Twitter use avatars of black flags, lions and green birds, to symbolize the virtues of martyrdom, it said.

Around 300 U.S.-based Daesh sympathizers spread propaganda for the group and recruit others via social media.

The report on the six-month study highlights how the internet and social media has overhauled radicalization and made it more accessible to more people.

"Some of the most important intelligence is no longer secret," former congresswoman and President of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Jane Harman, wrote in the forward to the report.

"Some of the best information is open-source, plastered on message boards or a 19-year-old’s Twitter feed. Policymakers have been slow to adapt; spies would still rather squint at satellite photos than scrape Facebook feeds," she added.

More than 7,000 pages of legal documents related to the 71 individuals charged with Daesh-related activities in the U.S. were examined for the study. Individuals differ widely in race, age, social class, education and have different motivations to join the militant group.

The average age for the 71 individuals is 26. More than 50 percent have traveled or attempted to travel abroad, 40 percent allegedly converted to Islam and 14 percent are female, said the report.

Active investigations in all 50 states are being conducted on sympathizers and U.S. law enforcement officials have already made arrests in 21 states.

The arrest of the 56 individuals for Daesh-related activities in 2015, represents the largest number of terrorism arrests in a single year since the deadly 9/11 attacks in 2001, according to the report that also notes that the highest number of Daesh recruits in the U.S. were charged in states of New York and Minnesota.
The UN estimates that more than 25,000 foreign terrorist fighters from more than 100 countries have traveled to Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen and Libya to join Daesh.


El hasta hace poco imparable avance de Estado Islámico a través de Siria e Iraq, donde se ha hecho con una importante extensión de territorio en la que viven unos 4 millones de personas bajo la bandera del autodenominado Califato, ha tenido su resonancia más allá de Oriente Próximo.

Las redes sociales han servido de caja de resonancia de la barbarie y la violencia del grupo terrorista, pero también de sus promesas y embustes para cautivar a millares de personas, sobre todo jóvenes, de los cinco continentes.

Los mensajes de la yihad han llegado incluso al corazón mismo de Estados Unidos, donde las autoridades llevan tiempo avisando del auge de los radicales islamistas dentro de las fronteras de la primera potencia mundial.

El perfil

La presencia de radicales yihadistas en Estados Unidos no es nueva, ni siquiera fruto de la aparición de Al Qaeda. Ya a mediados de los años 80, un pequeño contingente de estadounidenses musulmanes viajó a Afganistán para unirse a los muyaidines contra las tropas de la Unión Soviética en la hijrah, el traslado de una sociedad no-islámica a otra que sí lo es a imagen y semejanza de la peregrinación que hizo Mahoma de Medina a La Meca. Más tarde, durante los 90, otros viajaron hasta Chechenia o Bosnia para combatir a los "infieles".

No fue hasta los ataques del 11S cuando este movimiento se multiplicó, obligando a los servicios de contraterrorismo a reforzar sus medidas y protocolos de vigilancia y seguimiento en lo que es, según la Casa Blanca, "la mayor amenaza contra la seguridad nacional".

Entre 2001 y 2013, dos centenares de norteamericanos fueron condenados por...
actividades relacionadas con el radicalismo islámico, al tiempo que una cifra similar se habría unido a grupos terroristas de corte yihadista, desde los talibanes, a Lashkar-e-Taiba de Paquistán, Jemaah Islamiya de Indonesia o, más recientemente, Estado Islámico.

Un informe de la Universidad George Washington elaborado por los investigadores Lorenzo Vidino y Seamus Hughes pone de manifiesto la activa presencia de las redes de ISIS en EEUU, sobre todo en lo que se refiere a su aparato de captación.

Hasta la fecha, alrededor de 250 ciudadanos norteamericanos han viajado o han intentado viajar para enrolarse en las filas de Estado Islámico, según cifras proporcionadas por el FBI. Esto ha provocado que las autoridades de EEUU tengan abiertas casi un millar de investigaciones en el medio centenar de estados que componen el país. De ese cuarto de millar, una docena habría alcanzado puestos de relevancia dentro de la jerarquía de la organización y una veintena habría fallecido en combate.

A juicio de los investigadores, existe un perfil del yihadista estadounidense vinculado a ISIS, si bien los miembros identificados hasta la fecha difieren notablemente en raza, sexo, educación y extracción social. Este boceto lo compondría un varón, de 26 años (dos años menos que la media española), residente en el país, que ha viajado o lo ha intentado a zonas de influencia radical, sin intención de atentar localmente y cuyo proceso de radicalización se ha producido mayoritariamente en Internet, sobre todo a través de la red social Twitter.

Además, si bien una veintena de estados por todo el país cuentan con detenidos o yihadistas huidos, dos son los territorios de EEUU que destacan por ser vivero de este tipo de activistas: Nueva York y Minnesotta.

Twitter, el foro preferido

Los investigadores identifican al aparato de captación de radicales como la verdadera amenaza de ISIS dentro de EEUU. En este sentido, James Comey, director del FBI, reconocía hace unas semanas que "hay centenares, si no
miles de simpatizantes de Estado Islámico en Estados Unidos", una corriente que se traduce en 56 detenidos, por vinculación a organización terrorista sólo en lo que llevamos de año, siendo el más joven un chico de apenas 15 años.

En esta captación Internet juega un papel esencial, sobre todo redes sociales o aplicaciones como Facebook, Google+, Tumblr, Kik o Telegram. Aunque, por encima de todas ellas destaca Twitter, la plataforma por excelencia de los yihadistas.

Es en la red de microblogging donde los radicales se aprovechan de la búsqueda de "simpatía y compasión" de miles de jóvenes, a juicio de los investigadores, "para acercarles a su mensaje de odio y extremismo".

A menudo se valen de avatares, como leones, banderas de ISIS o pájaros verdes (símbolo del martirio), para ocultar su identidad y, aunque las autoridades les clausuran las cuentas una y otra vez, "ellos vuelven a abrir nuevas en una especie de juego del gato y el ratón que no sólo nunca termina, sino que en su ambiente les otorga prestigio y orgullo", sostienen Vidino y Hughes.

El informe también llama la atención sobre la verdadera capacidad mortífera de estos yihadistas en suelo de EEUU, que consideran "limitada". Mientras los islamistas han logrado atentar con éxito en los últimos años en tres ocasiones dentro de las fronteras del país, Little Rock (2009), Fort Hood (2009) y el maratón de Boston (2013), los supremacistas blancos han dejado el doble de muertos desde el 11S que los islamistas radicales.

En este sentido, ambos remarcan que la actividad de este tipo de redes es "significativamente menor, menos descentralizada y menos organizada" de la que se registra en los países europeos debido a una "mayor integración" de la comunidad musulmana en EEUU de la que tiene en Francia, Reino Unido, Alemania o Dinamarca.

Como conclusión, Vidino y Hughes relativizan la capacidad de actuación real que tiene Estado Islámico, que por el momento se centra más en la captación de yihadistas y aseguran que "la inmensa mayoría de estos extremistas nunca pasarán de la teoría a la práctica". 

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Weiterlesen: Verein Digitalcourage lehnt Anonymous-Aktion gegen IS ab


„Es ist eine Internet-Community mit unterschiedlichen Rollen und Persönlichkeiten, fast so wie es eine Gemeinschaft von Justin Bieber Fans gibt“, sagte Vidino, Co-Autor des Berichts. „Und es gibt zwischen diesen Sympathisanten viel mehr Koordination als wir dachten.“

Die Macher der Studie teilen die IS-Anhänger, die im Internet kommunizieren, in drei Gruppen ein:

Die Knoten, die die führenden Verfasser der Hauptinhalte sind.

Die Verstärker, die Inhalte retweeten. (Wobei das auch automatisiert geschehen kann).


By Johannes Schmitt


Was bewegt Menschen dazu, einer barbarischen Terrorgruppe wie dem Islamischen Staat (IS) zu folgen, deren mörderische Ideologie zu verbreiten und zum Krieg in den Nahen Osten zu reisen oder Attacken in der Heimat
zu planen? Welcher Schalter legt sich im Kopf um, der einen "typischen Schüler" zu einem Terroristen macht?

**Rache, Status, Identität und Nervenkitzel**


schreiben die Forscher Lorenzo Vidino und Seamus Hughes in der GW-Untersuchung.

FBI spornt Verdächtige an


Den Anstieg der Festnahmen führt sein Kollege Hughes neben der zunehmenden Propaganda im Internet auch auf die "Kreativität" der Strafverfolger zurück. Die gehen bei ihren Festnahmen seit 9/11 teils mit bedenklichen Methoden vor. Denn bei sogenannten "Sting Operations" werden Verdächtige zu kriminellen Handlungen angespornt. Doch wer kann versichern, ob ein mutmaßlicher Dschihadist wirklich einen Terroranschlag geplant und ausgeführt hätte, wenn ein verdeckter FBI-Agent ihn nicht per Twitter oder Facebook kontaktiert und dann zur Entgegennahme einer Bombenattrappe animiert hätte, nur damit die Handschellen klicken?


By Johannes Schmitt-Tegge

Cornell wurde oft wütend, isolierte sich und zog den Spott seiner Nachbarn auf sich. Und dann, eines Tages, informierte er Mitstreiter im Internet, das Kapitol in Washington angreifen und Rohrbomben zünden zu wollen. Als das FBI ihn Anfang 2015 festnahm, hatte er schon halbautomatische Sturmgewehre und 600 Schuss Munition gekauft.

Was bewegt Menschen dazu, einer barbarischen Terrorgruppe wie dem Islamischen Staat (IS) zu folgen, deren mörderische Ideologie zu verbreiten und zum Krieg in den Nahen Osten zu reisen oder Attacken in der Heimat zu planen? Welcher Schalter legt sich im Kopf um, der einen «typischen Schüler» zu einem Terroristen macht?


Politische Spannungen, etwa die Gewalt des syrischen Machthabers Baschar al-Assad gegen das eigene Volk, aber auch einschneidende persönliche Erlebnisse können zur Radikalisierung beitragen. Analyst Matt Venhaus unterteilt etwa in nach Rache, Status, Identität und Nervenkitzel suchenden Dschihadisten.

«Radikalisierung ist ein höchst komplexer und individualisierter Prozess, der oft durch ein schlecht verstandenes Zusammenspiel struktureller und persönlicher
Faktoren geformt wird», schreiben die Forscher Lorenzo Vidino und Seamus Hughes in der GW-Untersuchung.


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La Vanguardia: “Se dispara el numero de detenidos islamistas en EE.UU.”, December 2

By Jordi Barbeta

Mohamed Oda Dakhlla, de 22 años, estaba a punto de iniciar un posgrado en la Universidad de Misisipi y de casarse con Jaelyn Delshaun Young, su novia de 19 años, también estudiante de la MSU. La pareja planeó en secreto un viaje de novios a Grecia y Turquía... con destino final en Siria para incorporarse al Estado Islámico (EI). Su doble vida era desconocida para familiares y amigos, pero sus reflexiones en Twitter llamaron la atención del FBI, que les siguió la pista durante cuatro meses, hasta que les detuvo el 8 de agosto en un aeropuerto regional de Misisipi cuando se disponían a iniciar su yihadista luna de miel.

Fueron acusados de “conspiración para proveer apoyo material y recursos a una organización extranjera”. Mohamed y Jaelyn son dos de los 56 detenidos este año en EE.UU. por su vínculo con el Estado Islámico. Es el mayor número de detenciones relacionadas con el terrorismo en un solo año desde el ataque a las Torres Gemelas. Desde marzo del 2014 los arrestos se elevan a 71.

Estos datos los suministra el informe El Estado Islámico en América. De los retuits a Raqa, realizado por investigadores de la George Washington University (GWU). Entre las conclusiones, señala que los yihadistas reclutados por el EI son bastante más jóvenes que los reclutados anteriormente por Al Qaeda u otras organizaciones terroristas, son casi todos ciudadanos estadounidenses o residentes permanentes legales, pero lo más significativo es que no reflejan un perfil sociológico similar. “Las personas que participan en actividades relacionadas con el EI difieren ampliamente en la raza, la edad, la clase social, la educación y los antecedentes familiares. Sus motivaciones son igualmente diversas y desafían cualquier análisis superficial”, señala el informe, lo que dificulta el trabajo de los cuerpos de seguridad.

Sin ir más lejos, sólo el amor de la pareja explica la sintonía entre Daklalla y Young. Él es blanco, hijo de un imán, y ella es afroamericana, hija de un oficial de policía, y había destacado en el instituto como cheerleader. En la misma lista figura un adolescente de 15 años y un exoficial de la Fuerza Aérea, de 47. El 40% son musulmanes conversos, una significativa sobrerrepresentación en el...
ámbito del yihadismo se tiene en cuenta que los conversos representan el 23% de la población musulmana de EE.UU.

El trabajo de la GWU, que firman Lorenzo Vidino y Seamus Hughes, introduce el siguiente censo sobre los últimos 71 detenidos. La media de edad es de 26 años. El 86% son hombres. Actuaban en 21 estados diferentes. El 51% viajó o intentó viajar al extranjero. El 27% estaban involucrados en tentativas de atentado en EE.UU. Más de la mitad, el 55%, fueron interceptados por confidentes o agentes infiltrados. Tres han muerto en Estados Unidos cuando llevaban a cabo sus atentados y al menos 12 han perdido la vida lejos del continente americano.

La investigación ha identificado unos 300 simpatizantes del EI en EE.UU. muy activos en las redes sociales para difundir propaganda y propiciar la interacción con personas de ideas afines. Twitter es la herramienta que más utilizan, con cuentas que nacen y mueren constantemente. Hay nodos que dirigen a páginas principales, amplificadores que retuitean los mensajes y shot-outs que recuperan cuentas suspendidas. Las mujeres son el 14% pero asumen la tercera parte del trabajo en la red.

No queda claro qué es lo que propicia que “un guerrero del teclado dé el salto a la militancia real”, pero los autores subrayan que son una ínfima minoría que reacciona por motivaciones individuales. Será por ello que el FBI tiene 900 investigaciones abiertas y aunque casi todas resultan falsas alarmas continúa siguiendo la pista a 10.000 individuos por si a alguno se le cruzan los cables.

“Inmunidad a cambio del testimonio arrepentido”

“El desafío [del yihadismo en EE.UU.] no puede ser resuelto únicamente a base de detenciones”, señalan en su conclusiones los autores del informe de la GWU. En su opinión, velar por la aplicación de la ley “es vital pero insuficiente”, entre otros motivos porque “la mayoría de los simpatizantes del Estado Islámico en la fase inicial no necesariamente violan ninguna ley”. Los investigadores hacen una atrevida propuesta: “Hay una oportunidad sin explotar como es la versión de los estadounidenses reclutados por el EI que se han desilusionado con la causa. Estos individuos han caído por varias razones, ya sea experimentar la brutalidad de la vida bajo el EI o la búsqueda de una salida más positiva de la que los llevó al yihadismo. El Gobierno debería considerar la inmunidad para algunos combatientes extranjeros que regresan, ya que su testimonio sería el mensaje más eficaz contra el Estado Islámico”.

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The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) on Thursday was investigating whether the worst mass shooting in the United States in three years was a case of terrorism or workplace violence.

Two assailants clad in black tactical clothing opened fire Wednesday on a holiday party at a social services center in San Bernardino, California, killing at least 14 people and wounding more than 20 others.

Police identified the perpetrators as Syed Rizwan Farook, 28, and Tashfeen Malik, his 27-year-old wife. Both died in a shootout with law enforcement after fleeing the scene in a black SUV. Farook and Malik were armed with two AR-15 style semi-automatic assault rifles as well as Llama and Smith & Wesson handguns.

"The two handguns were purchased by him, the rifles were not, but all four guns were legally purchased," Jarrod Burguan, the police chief of San Bernardino, told a press conference. "There's no criminal record that he had that we're aware of."

After the shootout, police found 1,400 rounds of .223 caliber ammunition and 200 rounds of 9mm ammunition. A sweep of the couple's home in Redlands, California turned up more than 4,000 rounds of ammunition as well as 12 pipe bombs and tools to construct explosive devices.

"Clearly they were equipped and could've continued to carry out another attack," Burguan said. "They came prepared to do what they did, as if they were on a mission," he said.

'No parallel in the world'

In the aftermath of the shooting, the public debate in the United States immediately turned to the epidemic of mass shootings that has gripped the nation.

The massacre in San Bernardino was the worst since 2012, when a lone gunman shot dead 20 children and six adult staff at Sandy Hook Elementary School in
Newtown, Connecticut. President Barack Obama on Wednesday called for stricter gun laws in the aftermath of the tragedy in California.

"We have a pattern now of mass shootings in this country that has no parallel anywhere else in the world," Obama told CBS News. "There are some steps that we could take not to eliminate every one of these mass shootings, but to improve the odds that they don't happen as frequently."

'Relatively a singular motive'

There have been fears, just weeks after the attacks in Paris, that the massacre in San Bernardino was an act of Islamist terrorism.

Farook, an American of Pakistani descent, was described by a co-worker as a quiet man and devout Muslim who rarely talked about his religion, according to the Los Angeles Times.

The Times reported that Farook met his future wife, Malik, online and traveled last year to Saudi Arabia to meet her. Malik was a Pakistani citizen.

The couple targeted the holiday party of the county health department, Farook's employer of five years, which had rented space at the social services center. Investigators are examining workplace issues as a possible motivation for the shootings.

"Human beings are very complex animals, they rarely do something for a singular motive," Michael German, an expert on national security and civil liberties at the Brennan Center for Justice, told Deutsche Welle.

Guns, mental health and ideology

There have been 295 mass killings in the United States since 2006, approximately one every two weeks, according to an investigation by USA Today. The FBI defines a mass killing as taking four lives or more. Statistics change based on terminology and definitions.

Mass killings are routinely perpetrated by lone shooters with personal issues. Two cases had known or alleged connections to Islamist extremism.

In 2009, Nidal Hasan, an army psychiatrist, opened fire at Fort Hood, Texas, killing 13 people. Hasan was in contact with Anwar al-Awlaki, the imam and American citizen who was later killed in a 2011 US drone strike in Yemen. Washington said al-Awlaki was an al Qaeda recruiter.
Hasan said he attacked Fort Hood to defend the leaders of the Taliban. The military classified the shooting as an act of workplace violence, not terrorism. According to US broadcaster NPR, military officials had expressed concerned about Hasan's mental health prior to the mass shooting at Fort Hood.

"You’re going to have cases in which a personal motivation - dissatisfaction with a job, anger at the co-workers - mixes with more political, ideological reasons," Lorenzo Vidino, director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University, told DW.

In July of 2015, Mohammad Abdulazeez, a 24-year-old engineer, opened fire at a military recruiting center and a navy operations support center, killing four marines and a sailor. The case was investigated as an act of terrorism, though the FBI found no connections to Islamic State. Abdulazeez had substance abuse issues and received treatment for depression.

There was also an attack in Garland, Texas last May that was claimed by Islamic State. Two gunmen opened fire outside of an event displaying images of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad. Both gunmen were shot dead by police. There were no other casualties.

Hasan bought his pistol legally. Abdulazeez bought some firearms legally and may have acquired others illegally, according to law enforcement. The FBI hasn't released information on the origins of the weapons in the Garland attack.

"It's America, it's easy to get guns," Lorenzo said. "Nothing is done on weapons."

'Treat all violence equally'

According to a June study by the New America Foundation, white supremacists and anti-government radicals have killed 48 people in the United States, while Islamist extremists have killed 26 since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Last week, Robert Dear opened fire with a semi-automatic rifle at a Planned Parenthood Clinic, which provides health services to women, killing three people and wounding nine others. Dear was reportedly a self-professed Christian, staunchly opposed to abortion, described as disturbed and a recluse. Planned Parenthood performs abortions among a host of other medical procedures.

"Whether it's the act of a lone shooter, like the vast majority of mass shootings are, or the work of a white supremacist terrorist, or a left-wing terrorist, or a
Muslim terrorist - that shouldn’t really matter very much, but it seems to matter for everything in terms of what our response is," German said.

"We need to address all threats of violence equally and not emphasize one over another because that will end up creating flawed policies," he said.


New York. Le autorità federali americane dicono che Tashfeen Malik, la parte più oscura ed enigmatica della coppia di attentatori di San Bernardino, aveva giurato fedeltà allo Stato islamico su Facebook poco prima della strage. Ci sono stati contatti telefonici con altre persone sotto inchiesta per terrorismo, e l’Fbi si muove ufficialmente in quella direzione. Tutti gli indizi del massacro californiano si stavano rapidamente allineando sulla traiettoria dell’estremismo islamico, nonostante le dichiarazioni corrette sull’incapacità di comprendere il movente, ma le connessioni dirette con il brodo ideologico del jihad dissolvono gli ultimi scrupoli. L’usanza di prestare “bay’ah”, il giuramento coranico, attraverso i social network prima di un attacco è diffusa, specialmente per i jihadisti occidentali ispirati ma non direttamente coordinati da un apparato terroristico centrale. In maggio, Elton Simpson aveva giurato fedeltà al califfo Abu Bakr al Baghdadi con un messaggio su Twitter prima di tentare l’assalto a un centro congressi di Garland, in Texas, dove si stava svolgendo una gara di vignette su Maometto. Una fonte della polizia ha detto al New York Times e ad altri media che “a questo punto crediamo che siano più autoradicalizzati e ispirati dal gruppo che effettivamente guidati”, ma altri dettagli emersi sulla coppia di San Bernardino mettono in imbarazzo l’idea della “autoradicalizzazione”. Un parente di Malik ha detto che la ragazza pachistana si è trasferita con la famiglia in Arabia Saudita quando lei aveva due anni. Lì il padre è diventato “un conservatore duro”, tanto che i parenti che dal Pakistan andavano in visita tornavano impressionati dal suo estremo fervore religioso.

Tashfeen è cresciuta in quell’ambiente, ed è tornata in Pakistan qualche anno fa. Ha incontrato online il marito, Syed Farook, nato e cresciuto in America ma versato nello studio e nell’interpretazione radicale del Corano. L’idea del
jihadista “aurantializzato” contiene in filigrana quella della persona un po’ toccata e antisociale che passa troppi notti sui siti sbagliati finché non emerge dal fondo della coscienza una fascinazione per la violenza divina, mentre tende a obliterare il ruolo dell’educazione e del contesto. Nella strage californiana l’educazione e il contesto si stanno chiarendo. Certo, un attacco ispirato ed eseguito da fanatici semi indipendenti è molto diverso da un’azione militare ordinata e finanziata dai luogotenenti dello Stato islamico, ma questa è la natura “liquida” del jihad americano. E in un certo senso l’attacco ispirato e liquido è “il più terrificante”, come ha scritto l’analista Aaron David Miller: “E’ più difficile da sventare, e gli aspiranti jihadisti che sono già qui sono più numerosi di quelli delle squadre che cercano di fermarli”.

magazine qaidista in inglese che al Awlaki dirigeva assieme a Samir Khan, jihadista cresciuto nel Queens. Da qualche mese, spiega Vidino, nel flusso eterogeneo delle comunicazioni dirette ai combattenti americani c’è un’indicazione ricorrente: “Concentrarsi sugli attacchi in occidente, invece che tentare la difficile attraversata per combattere al fronte”.

Formiche: “*Isis piomba sull’America*”, December 4, 2015

By Michele Pierri

Mercoledì mattina a San Bernardino, in California, quattordici persone sono state uccise e diciassette sono rimaste ferite in una sparatoria condotta da una coppia di coniugi, che si pensa possano aver avuto un movente politico, forse legato alle idee propagandate dallo Stato Islamico: lui, **Syed Rizwan Farook**, ventottenne americano nato da genitori di origine pakistana, musulmano; lei, **Tashfeen Malik**, ventisettenne (“Fede nell’Isis”, aveva scritto sul web).

**LE TENSIONI SOCIALI**

L’episodio ha alzato ancora di più il livello di tensione tra gli islamici residenti negli Usa e il resto della popolazione. **Parlando al Los Angeles Times**, Mahmoud Tarifi, leader del centro islamico di Claremont, ha spiegato che i musulmani temono di essere a loro volta “vittime” di queste violenze. “Ci sentiamo come dopo l’11 Settembre e gli attacchi nella capitale francese”. Un sentimento manifestato anche da **Ibrahim Hooper**, direttore delle comunicazioni nazionali per il Council on American Islamic Relations, che **alla Cnn ha detto** di stare operando “in un clima di isteria e di paura, mai visto così, nemmeno dopo l’attacco alle Torri Gemelle”.

**JIHADISTI MADE IN USA**

Considerati un modello d’integrazione e assimilazione tra fedi e nazionalità diverse, gli Stati Uniti scoprono oggi di avere, al pari del Vecchio continente, un problema con le nuove generazioni che decidono di abbracciare un’idea violenta di Islam da applicare in casa propria, al di là dei fatti San Bernardino. Anche per questa ragione si sa molto della radicalizzazione dei giovani europei, un po’ meno di quella dei ragazzi americani. Chi sono e come si avvicinano alla jihad? A tracciare un identikit dei militanti musulmani made in Usa ci ha provato...

LE RAGIONI DELLA RADICALIZZAZIONE

Cosa li spinge, allora, a radicalizzarsi? “Alcune reclute – spiega lo studio – sembrano aderire al gruppo per cause politiche, differenze culturali, o sentimenti di privazione dei diritti civili dati dalla cultura americana”. In altri casi, invece “gli individui hanno cominciato a sostenere lo Stato Islamico a seguito di eventi traumatici che hanno cambiato loro la vita”. Fino all’autunno del 2015, aggiunge il report citando stime governative, erano “250 gli americani che hanno viaggiato o tentato di recarsi in Siria o Iraq per unirsi all’Isis”. Molti di loro “sono anche stati direttamente coinvolti in complotti per compiere attacchi sul suolo americano, ma “pochi hanno raggiunto una posizione di leadership di livello medio”.

LE CRITICHE POLITICHE

Il tema del rapporto con l’Islam non è tuttavia confinato solo a media, accademia e think tank, ma è entrato prepotentemente anche nel dibattito delle prossime elezioni presidenziali. A cavalcarlo, riporta Reuters, sono soprattutto i candidati repubblicani. Ieri, racconta l’agenzia stampa, molti dei contendenti alla nomination del Gop hanno definito la strage californiana come “un segno che” la sicurezza degli americani è messa a repentaglio “da militanti islamici” cresciuti negli Stati Uniti, proprio come è accaduto a Parigi. “Non c’è nessun dubbio”, ha detto il repubblicano John Kasich, governatore dell’Ohio, “che questo è un tentativo di distruggere il nostro modo di vivere”. Mentre il senatore texano del Gop, Ted Cruz, ha colto la palla al balzo per criticare l’amministrazione democratica, dicendo che Obama non ha adottato misure per
La Stampa: “Fra lupi solitary e boom di arresti l’America si riscopre vulnerabile”, December 4, 2015

By Francesco Semprini

Si chiama parcellizzazione del terrore, ovvero un pericolo costituito da una serie di fattori, che se messi a sistema rappresentano una minaccia di grandi dimensioni. Una minaccia che potrebbe non essere slegata allo Stato islamico e alla sua campagna di disintegrazione che attraverso l’Europa giunge sino negli Stati Uniti.

Da un punto di vista pratico, gli Usa sono meno esposti degli alleati del Vecchio continente al rischio di infiltrazione di jihadisti che emulano o sono collegati a vario titolo al Califfo Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Se non altro per motivi geografici, ovvero di minore vicinanza all’epicentro del terrore che si trova a cavallo di Siria e Iraq. Eppure ci sono una serie di fattori che considerati nel loro insieme rendono gli Stati Uniti altrettanto vulnerabili.

**Sempre più donne**

Una dimostrazione, forse, arriva proprio da San Bernardino, un attacco diverso rispetto a Parigi o Tunisi, eppure un atto di terrore in piena regola.

Iniziamo dal dato principale: le autorità americane nel 2015 hanno arrestato 56 persone con l’accusa di sostenere l’Isis. Lo afferma un nuovo studio della George Washington University, secondo cui si tratta del maggior numero di arresti connessi al terrorismo nel Paese in un solo anno dal settembre 2001. Non c’è un profilo preciso, anche se la maggioranza sono giovani, e poi c’è un crescente ruolo delle donne. L’elemento comune è l’utilizzo dei social network per conoscersi e magari organizzarsi, come dire Internet è la porta di accesso al mondo parallelo della jihad autogestita. Che può diventare ancora più
pericolosa grazie a quei siti Web di ispirazione jihadista che insegnano, passo dopo passo, a costruire ordini e armi. Non serve insomma chissà quale regia o sistema per pianificare un attentato.

Lorenzo Vidino, direttore del programma sull’estremismo dell’ateneo e autore dello studio, sottolinea al New York Times «la sconcertante diversità» degli affiliati o degli affiliandi. L’80% degli arrestati ha meno di 30 anni, e il 40% meno di 21, mentre il 14% è composto da donne. Nella stragrande maggioranza si tratta di cittadini americani o residenti permanenti negli Usa. Un dato, questo, che sottolinea la crescente minaccia interna e le difficoltà che le autorità devono affrontare. Ce n’è abbastanza per creare fobia, e del resto una crescente parte di americani, tradizionalmente tolleranti e aperti all’accoglienza, si chiede se sia il caso di aprire le porte ai profughi siriani. Anche perché l’America deve già affrontare il problema dell’immigrazione clandestina che arriva da sud, messicani in particolare, ma anche tanti centroamericani. Le due cose non sono correlate in origine, ma la porosità dei confini meridionali è senza dubbio un vulnus, innanzitutto per i traffici illeciti e per una certa criminalità, specie legata al narcotraffico, e come dimostra il caso dell’Africa occidentale e del Maghreb, talvolta il terrorismo islamico utilizza questi come strumento per far cassa.

Troppe armi

C’è infine l’ultimo aspetto, quello di cui si parla in tutti gli Usa almeno una volta al mese, ovvero ogni volta che accade una strage. È la circolazione selvaggia di armi e fucili, e la facilità di ottenerli attraverso «background check» di pura routine. Un pericolo «legale» e diffuso che rende impossibile fare controlli incrociati, e suggerisce come la strage della California sembra inaugurare una nuova fase di terrore anche in America.


By J. Jaime Hernandez
Qui aurait pu deviner que Mohammad et Jaelyn, un couple sans histoires, préparaient en secret leur lune de miel en Syrie ? Lui, 22 ans, fils d’un imam local, était sur le point d’être diplômé de la Mississipi State University. Elle, 19 ans, fille de policier et ancienne pom pom girl, étudiait la chimie. Ces jeunes américains rêvaient pourtant du califat auto-proclamé par l’organisation État islamique (EI).


Cette histoire a fait la une des journaux aux États-Unis. Avec des dizaines d’autres, elle a été reprise par une étude de la George Washington University, publiée début décembre 2015 et intitulée : "Daech en Amérique : de Twitter à Raqqa". Une huitaine de chercheurs, menés par Lorenzo Vidino et Seamus Hughes, se sont intéressés à un phénomène en hausse "sans précédent" : les sympathisants de l’EI aux États-Unis.


En automne 2015, Washington avance le chiffre de plus de 250 individus ayant voyagé ou tenté le voyage en Syrie ou en Irak depuis le sol américain. Et, record depuis le 11-Septembre, 71 citoyens ou résidents américains ont été...
inculpés pour leur liens avec l’EI depuis mars 2014, dont 56 sur la seule année 2015.

Une "scène jihadiste" plus petite et isolée qu’en Europe

"Comme en Europe, c’est un groupe extrêmement divers, assure Lorenzo Vidino à France 24. Je dirais même que c’est encore plus vrai aux États-Unis, avec des hommes, des femmes, des adolescents, des quarantenaires, des petits délinquants, des doctorants…"

Le chercheur note deux différences majeures avec les Européens : "La ‘scène jihadiste’ américaine, si elle existe, est non seulement beaucoup plus petite mais aussi plus isolée. Ceux qui se radicalisent, en ligne ou par petits groupes, ont du mal à trouver de sérieuses connexions avec l’EI, soit pour des raisons géographiques, soit parce qu’il n’existe pas les mêmes réseaux de recrutement qu’en Europe."

Le cas d’Alex, 23 ans, est un archétype. Cette habitante d’une zone rurale de l’État de Washington, qui a arrêté ses études, a été élevée par ses grands-parents, très chrétiens. Elle dit vivre "au milieu de nulle part" et n’a aucun lien avec l’islam. Mais durant l’été 2014, la décapitation filmée de l’otage américain James Foley suscite en elle une "curiosité horrifiée".

Au bout de quelques mois, elle se met à échanger par email et par Skype avec des membres de l’EI. Ses nouveaux amis lui envoient de l’argent, des cartes cadeaux et même du chocolat. La jeune femme finit par embrasser l’idéologie du groupe jihadiste. Elle annonce sa conversion sur Internet et, quelques heures plus tard, ses "followers" sont multipliés par deux. Elle tweete alors : "I actually have brothers and sisters. I am crying." ("J’ai bel et bien des frères et des soeurs. Je suis en pleurs.") Tout en menant cette vie secrète, elle continue à enseigner le dimanche dans l’église familiale. Quand sa grand-mère se rend compte de sa double vie, Alex promet de tout arrêter. Mais aujourd’hui, les chercheurs pensent qu’il n’en est rien.

L’EI exploite aussi le slogan #BlackLivesMatter

Des cas comme celui d’Alex, l’équipe de Lorenzo Vidino en a repéré 300 sur Twitter. Nombreux sont ceux qui affichent en avatar la photo de compatriotes morts ou arrêtés. Et, mélange des genres inédit, certains utilisent l’image de l’équipe de football américain des Detroit Lions, "combinaison ainsi une fierté typiquement américaine - une équipe de la NFL - et un symbole islamique très populaire chez les supporteurs de l’EI, représentant le courage".
La lutte contre l’intervention occidentale en Syrie et le rejet de la société de consommation sont leurs motivations les plus fréquentes. Pour y faire écho, l’EI n’hésite d’ailleurs pas à exploiter les hashtags en vogue aux États-Unis. L’organisation a ainsi tenté de récupérer le soutien des Afro-Américains musulmans en relayant le slogan #BlackLivesMatter. Mais, selon Lorenzo Vidoni, il n’y a "absolument aucune preuve" que cette démarche ait abouti. En revanche, il existe "un petit nombre de cas, pas nécessairement religieux, mais très politisés et opposés à la société américaine. Soit parce qu’ils pensent qu’elle est raciste : ils trouvent alors en l’islam un message de fraternité, une communauté où la couleur n’a pas d’importance. Soit parce qu’ils sont anticapitalistes : des militants environnementalistes ou issus des mouvements ‘Occupy’.


Et puis il y a les profils un peu perdus. Élevée dans une famille pauvre et évangélique, Ariel Bradley est en "quête perpétuelle de sens", selon une amie : "Quand je l’ai rencontrée, elle était avec un chrétien. Puis elle s’est mise avec un socialiste, ensuite avec un athée et après avec un musulman." Ariel tombe amoureuse du patron d’une pizzeria où elle travaillait et se convertit à l’islam pour lui plaire. La relation ne tiendra pas. En août 2011, elle rencontre un Irakien. Mariage, enfant… puis, début 2014, c’est le départ en Syrie. Aujourd’hui, Ariel est toujours active sur Twitter et Instagram. Elle a par exemple célébré les attaques de Chattanooga, sa ville natale, en juillet.

**Les autorités sont dépassées**

Face à tous ces cas, comment les autorités réagissent-elles ? Une méthode connaît un certain succès, celle de l’"agent provocateur". Cette procédure, qui consiste à pousser au crime afin d’arrêter en flagrant délit, est très décriée par une partie de la communauté musulmane américaine. Mais si elle est moralement discutable, elle "fait ses preuves en matière d’inculpations", selon Lorenzo Vidino.
L'exemple de Christopher Lee Cornell est édifiant. Après sa conversion à l'islam, il s’isole de plus en plus et développe un alter ego en ligne, "Raheel Mahrus Ubaydah", ainsi qu’une myriade de contacts virtuels. Parmi eux, un agent du FBI sous couverture. Christopher va l’informer de son intention d’attaquer le Capitole, à Washington. Il sera arrêté en janvier 2015, après avoir acheté plusieurs fusils semi-automatiques et 600 cartouches de munitions au cours d’une opération montée par le FBI.


Simpson, via son compte Twitter "Shariah is Light", répond alors publiquement à cet appel au meurtre. Le 3 mai 2015, quelques minutes avant la tuerie, le terroriste tweetera une dernière fois, en utilisant le hashtag "#texasattack".

Face à la menace jihadiste, les arrestations, bien que nécessaires, ne sont pas suffisantes, pour Lorenzo Vidino. "D’ailleurs, de nombreux sympathisants de l’EI n’ont violé aucune loi, relève-t-il, surtout aux États-Unis avec le 1er amendement qui protège la liberté d’expression." Selon le chercheur, des tactiques complémentaires doivent être mises en place : "Il faut impliquer les communautés, la société civile, les familles pour empêcher la radicalisation dès le départ." Et pour dissuader les nouvelles recrues, le témoignage de ceux qui sont revenus déçus de Syrie pourrait être utile. Leur message, conclut l’étude, résonnera toujours mieux auprès des radicalisés que celui de la contre-propagande de l’Oncle Sam.

El Mundo: “La Casa Blance dice no tener indicios de que los autores del tiroteo formaran parte de un grupo organizado”, December 5, 2015

By Carolina M. Adalid

George Washington University’s Program on Extremism 321
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Cansados de plegarias y oraciones tras los ataques masivos en Estados Unidos como el ocurrido en San Bernardino (California), en el que murieron 14 personas y resultaron heridas 21 el pasado miércoles, más voces se han alzado alto y claro a favor del control de armas. Entre ellos, el diario 'The New York Times', que ha llevado su editorial a portada reclamando que determinado tipo de armas "de guerra" no puedan ser adquirido por civiles. Algo que no ocurría desde 1920 cuando lamentó la nominación presidencial de un candidato republicano.

La voz de Obama, un clásico en la lucha por el control de armas, se volvió a escuchar en su discurso semanal apelando a cerrar agujeros legislativos -por ejemplo para que aquellos que están en la 'lista negra' de pasajeros no puedan comprar un arma- y a trabajar todos juntos para "evitar que la gente sea víctima de estas ideologías de odio" en referencia a ISIS y otros grupos extremistas.

En el video mensaje emitido este sábado, Obama reconoció la posibilidad de que la pareja sospechosa de perpetrar el tiroteo, Syed Farook y Tashfeen Malik, hubieran caído en las garras de la radicalización. "Una amenaza en la que hemos estado centrados durante años; el peligro a que la gente sucumba a las ideologías de violencia extremista". Un informe de la Universidad George Washington presentado hace unos días y realizado por Lorenzo Vidino, apuntaba que alrededor de 300 personas habían sido identificadas como seguidores o reclutados de ISIS.

La Casa Blanca añadió a lo dicho por el presidente que en estos momentos "no existen indicios" de que los supuestos atacantes formaran parte de un grupo organizado. Esta información se basa en las pesquisas realizadas por el FBI.

De hecho, el ataque al centro de servicios sociales Inland Regional Center fue reivindicado por ISIS. "Rezamos a dios para que los acepte como mártires" decía un reportaje en radio al-Bayan, la emisora de los extremistas según recogía la CNN. Este mensaje se difundió un día después de que se conociera que Malik había dejado un mensaje en Facebook declarando supuestamente su lealtad al Estado Islámico, según fuentes de la investigación.

Con la vista puesta en la seguridad de los estadounidenses, Obama también hizo hincapié en la necesidad de no poner tan fácil a los "potenciales criminales o terroristas hacerse con un arma que podrían usar contra los Americanos" y recordó que las que usaron los asesinos en San Bernardino son "armas de guerra". Durante la investigación del ataque que lidera el FBI, se recuperaron
dos rifles semiautomáticos A-15, comprados legalmente y modificados ilegalmente, y dos pistolas semiautomáticas de 9 mm.

En la portada del periódico y con el título "la epidemia de las armas", 'The New York Times' también utilizaba la expresión "armas de guerra" para referirse a las confiscadas en San Bernardino y califica de "indignación moral y desgracia nacional" que la gente pueda comprar estas armas diseñadas específicamente para "matar a una velocidad y eficacia brutal".

Con este inusual gesto, el periódico buscaba "una declaración visible y potente de la frustración y angustia sobre la incapacidad de nuestro país para llegar a un acuerdo sobre el azote de las armas", señaló el editor Arthur Sulzberger en un comunicado.

El periódico sostenía que los motivos no importan a los muertos en California ni en Colorado, Oregón, Carolina del Sur, Virginia... y tantos otros estados. Estas matanzas, subrayaba, son todas actos de terrorismo. Así no dudada en señalar que la atención y el enfado de los americanos "debería dirigirse a los líderes electos cuyo trabajo es mantenernos seguros pero que ponen una prima más alta en el dinero y en el poder político de una industria dedicada a sacar beneficio de la expansión sin trabas de armas cada vez más potentes".

El Senado de EEUU rechazó el pasado jueves dos medidas presentadas por los demócratas. Una de ellas, encaminada a reforzar la verificación de antecedentes en la compra de armas. La otra enmienda pretendía impedir que quiénes estén en lista de vigilancia terroristas puedan adquirir una.

Ante la oposición de un nutrido grupo de legisladores -la mayoría republicanos-, el diario 'The New York Daily News' salió a la calle el viernes con una portada controvertida. "Dios no puede arreglar esto" escribía junto a los tuits de varios candidatos republicanos a la Casa Blanca que expresaron sus condolencias y "oraciones" por las víctimas. El periódico ha sido activo en la batalla por el control de armas desde la masacre de Sandy Hook en la que murieron 20 niños y seis adultos. La misma tragedia con la que Obama arrancó su frustrada cruzada contra las armas. El debate, sin embargo, parece imparable.
Slate FR: “Le profil-type des sympathisante de Daech aux États-Unis”, December 5, 2015

By Daphnee Leportois


En moyenne, ces aspirants djihadistes ont 26 ans. La personne la plus jeune à avoir été arrêtée pour des activités terroristes en lien avec l’État islamique était un jeune garçon de 15 ans. Les chercheurs remarquent que l’âge moyen des individus arrêtés est plus bas que celui des personnes arrêtées pour des faits de terrorisme dans le passé. Ils citent les propos du procureur général adjoint John Carlin: «Dans plus de 50% des cas, les prévenus ont moins de 25 ans, et dans un peu plus d’un tiers des cas ils ont moins de 21 ans.»

Citoyens américains à 81%

Outre la jeunesse des individus, ce se sont aussi en majorité des hommes, à 86%. Mais les deux spécialistes de l’extrémisme nuancent en signalant que les femmes ont un rôle de plus en plus important dans l’univers djihadiste, qui varie de propagandiste à recruteuse en passant par «femme de djihadiste» ou «mère de la nouvelle génération».

En majorité, les individus inculpés étaient des citoyens américains (58, soit 81%) ou des résidents permanents (8%). Ce qui devrait doucher la psychose anti-réfugiés qui a cours aux États-Unis. En outre, 40% des individus arrêtés étaient des convertis à l’islam –une surreprésentation, précisent les chercheurs, étant donné que seulement 23% des musulmans américains sont des convertis.

Enfin, si les deux auteurs du rapport notent que ces individus sont particulièrement actifs sur Twitter, ils rappellent que leur radicalisation n’est en
The stream of recent terror attacks against targets in several countries across four continents continues to vex governments and other institutions that seek desperately to counter and eventually stop this dangerous trend. New research indicates two broad trends, however, that beg for more diligent action based on more credible diagnoses. The first trend is how very complex is the problem of terrorism and its causes, whether it is carried out by individuals who act on their own due to personal grievances, or organized groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS [Daesh] that use religion to mobilize. The second is the limited impact to date of the two principal strategies to fight these groups – military action and digital counternarrative programs.

The past week typically provides a familiar array of evidence in this arena. This includes the British government’s launching of air attacks against ISIS targets in Syria, reports of ISIS strengthening its foothold in parts of northern Libya and Al-Qaeda expanding its control of towns in southeastern Yemen.

The latest attack to attract global attention was the killing of 14 people in San Bernardino, California, this week, by the husband and wife team of Syed Farook and Tashfeen Malik, of Pakistani origin. We will know in due course whether they were acting alone or were linked to Islamist or other groups that “radicalized” them online or through personal contacts.

Two important new reports in the United States this week clarify the difficulties involved in defeating ISIS, or at least reducing its impact around the world. The first was a study by the Program on Extremism at George Washington University that analyzed the range of individuals against whom legal action was taken. It showed that there is no single profile of a typical ISIS recruit. Rather, the very
wide range of people who explore ISIS and similar ideologies suggests that no single strategy – such as social media counternarratives or more public activism by “moderate” Muslims – will succeed in reducing the threat.

Another press report said that the U.S. government’s campaign to counter ISIS recruitment efforts through online activities has not worked very well. The campaign needed to be revamped, yet again, because many existing efforts to reduce the flow of recruits to ISIS and Al-Qaeda by using online media instruments have not diminished the flow of recruits.

This has been accompanied by intense, and increasing, military actions by a dozen Arab and foreign governments against facilities and leaders of these terror groups. None of these strategies on their own or together seem to have blunted the ability of Islamist militant groups to keep expanding in pockets here and there, and to keep attracting new recruits. Every week provides fresh evidence of both these troubling realities.

Is it possible that the military, digital and other policies being carried out to defeat ISIS and Al-Qaeda are largely based on wrong or incomplete diagnoses of precisely why such groups came into being and continue to attract recruits and supporters? Are we seeing a repeat of the “war on drugs” that the U.S. government launched decades ago, without making any substantial progress in reducing drug use or trade?

The George Washington University report said that 56 people were arrested in the U.S. this year on charges of supporting or plotting with ISIS. Their ages varied, and they came from a very wide range of religions, ethnicities, professional backgrounds and places of residence, making it difficult for law enforcement organizations to spot potential recruits to radical movements before they become a danger to society. Some only dabbled in reading ISIS-related websites or social media; others traveled to Syria and Iraq; and a few seemed ready to plan attacks in the U.S. The numbers involved are relatively small. About 250 Americans are thought to have traveled or attempted to travel to join ISIS in some manner, and U.S. government agencies are investigating some 900 cases of individuals across the U.S. who allegedly support ISIS.

The second important report this week, from the Washington Post, covered the findings of an expert group commissioned by the U.S. government to assess the State Department’s programs to counter ISIS and other such militant groups, primarily by using social media. The State Department’s counternarrative attempts via social media seem to have had little impact, this and other reports
have indicated. So these efforts may be scaled down soon, given doubts about “the U.S. government’s ability to serve as a credible voice against the terrorist group’s propaganda,” according to current and former U.S. officials quoted in the report.

This has been just one more typical week in the confounding “global war on terror,” in which terrorists perform their evil deeds across many countries while governments keep looking for the appropriate strategy to defeat them. If governments persist in their existing strategies, expect the terrorists to persist as well.

Blick: “Das Burkaverbot bingt die Schweiz in Gefahr”, December 6, 2015

By Von Philippe Pfister and Simon Marti


Freysinger reagiert auf die Analyse des Experten gelassen. Er wisse, dass er auf einer Abschussliste stehe – den Mund verbieten lassen wolle er sich nicht.


In dieses Bild passt eine Zahl, die der Kommandant der Zürcher Stadtpolizei, Daniel Blumer (58), gestern im «Tages-Anzeiger» nannte: «Im Kanton Zürich haben wir mehr als ein Dutzend Personen aus islamistischen Kreisen im Fokus», sagte er. Keine erschreckend hohe Zahlen also. Die Dschihadisten-Szene sei im Vergleich zu jener in Frankreich und Deutschland überschaubar und weniger gut entwickelt, sagt Vidino.


Andererseits sei jede Religion, die sich an die Gesetze halte und nicht aggressiv missioniere, willkommen: «Ich stehe in Kontakt zu moderaten muslimischen Verbänden. Wir sprechen ganz normal miteinander», sagt Wobmann. Dass er auch schon bedroht wurde, nimmt er in Kauf. «Wir dürfen uns nicht einschüchtern lassen.»
Handelsblatt: “Dschihadisten Aus Den USA”, December 6, 2015

**Rache, Status, Identität und Nervenkitzel sind Motive**


Dschihadist wirklich einen Terroranschlag geplant und ausgeführt hätte, wenn ein verdeckter FBI-Agent ihn nicht per Twitter oder Facebook kontaktiert und dann zur Entgegennahme einer Bombenattrappe anmutete, nur damit die Handschellen klicken?


Ottawa Citizen: “Face of the threat: A profile of Islamic State recruits and sympathizers from the U.S.”, December 6, 2015

By David Pugliese

Here is what the U.S. researchers found after going through court records, social media accounts and other documents:

Average age: 26.
Eighty-six per cent are male.

Twitter and other social media is the main venue they use to gather and spread information about the Islamic State

“The profiles of individuals involved in ISIS-related activities in the U.S. differ widely in race, age, social class, education, and family background,” noted the report by Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes. “Their motivations are equally diverse and defy easy analysis.”

Number of people in U.S. charged with activities related to the Islamic State since March 2014: 71
Age: from 15 to 50
Number of active investigations into Islamic State activities in the U.S.: 900
Number of U.S. linked social media accounts spreading Islamic State propaganda: 300
Number of females behind those accounts: 100
Motivations: It varies. An estimated 40 per cent were Muslim converts. Others were drawn to the thrill of combat or violence promoted by the Islamic State.
Number of Americans who travelled to Syria or Iraq to join the Islamic State: 250
Some conclusions: The report noted that most of the U.S.-based supporters of the Islamic State “will never make the leap from talk to action, from being keyboard warriors to actual militancy.”
“Some will mature out of what is just an awkward adolescent phase. Others simply lack the personality traits necessary for committing terror attacks or setting out for ISIS territory. On a more mundane level, others find themselves restrained by the practical commitments of their daily lives.”


By Joan Faus

Los simpatizantes yihadistas en Estados Unidos son un colectivo heterogéneo. Es imposible encasillarlos en un perfil único, lo que complica a las autoridades su detección. Pero dentro de esa diversidad, sobresalen tendencias que esbozan un retrato aproximado. La edad media es 26 años, el 86% son hombres, la gran mayoría no tiene antecedentes de radicalización y son ciudadanos estadounidenses o residentes permanentes, y el 40% son conversos al Islam (casi el doble que la media nacional), según un estudio de la Universidad George Washington.

El informe, publicado esta semana antes del tiroteo en California, obtiene esos datos a partir del análisis de las 71 personas -entre 15 y 47 años- detenidas en EE UU desde marzo de 2014 acusadas de apoyar al Estado Islámico (ISIS, en sus siglas en inglés). Este año han sido arrestadas, por ahora, 56 personas. Es la cifra más alta de detenciones relacionadas con terrorismo desde los atentados del 11-S en 2001.
Los investigadores subrayan que la “intensidad y tamaño” de la radicalización en EE UU es “significativamente más pequeña” que en la mayoría de países europeos. Pero la primera potencia mundial tiene una particularidad que la diferencia del resto de países industrializados y que hace mucho más peligroso el riesgo de ataques solitarios: el fácil acceso a armas de fuego. Lo recuerda con letanía, tras cada matanza, el presidente estadounidense, Barack Obama, que insta al Congreso a endurecer los controles de venta.

“Tienes una escena más pequeña aquí, menos sofisticada y con menos vínculos con ISIS, pero tienen acceso a armas”, dice en una entrevista Lorenzo Vidino, director del programa sobre extremismo de la Universidad George Washington y coautor del informe.

Syed Farook, de 28 años, y su esposa, Tashfeen Malik, de 27, usaron el miércoles dos rifles y dos pistolas en su asalto a un centro social en San Bernardino, a las afueras de Los Ángeles, en que mataron a 14 personas. Todas las armas fueron compradas legalmente. Farook adquirió las pistolas. Una tercera persona compró los rifles y se desconoce cómo llegaron a la pareja.

Farook y Malik -que fallecieron tras la matanza y que tenían una hija de seis meses- no estaban siendo investigados. Justo antes de perpetrar su sin razón, la mujer juró lealtad al ISIS en Facebook. El FBI sostiene que hay indicaciones de que la pareja se radicalizó y pudo ser inspirada por organizaciones terroristas, pero no se han hallado pruebas de que integrara una.

Aunque cada caso es distinto, los perfiles de los autores del tiroteo en San Bernardino -el más grave en este país desde 2012- coinciden con algunos de los rasgos descritos en el informe. Son ciudadanos nacidos en EE UU (Farook) o residentes legales (Malik consiguió un visado tras su matrimonio). Están cerca de la edad media de 26 años. Y confirman uno de los hallazgos de la investigación: el “creciente papel prominente de mujeres en el mundo yihadista”.

Más prevención

La radicalización yihadista no es un fenómeno nuevo en EE UU. Por ejemplo, en los años ochenta ciudadanos estadounidenses se unieron a los muyahidines afganos. Pero el ISIS, dice Vidino, ha disparado la tendencia por la “atracción” de su expansión hace un año en Irak y Siria, y su habilidad propagandística en Internet.

Es un riesgo creciente, pero no descontrolado. El FBI estima que hay centenares, sino miles, de simpatizantes yihadistas en EE UU. La mayoría,
puntualiza el informe, “nunca harán el salto de hablar a la acción”. De los detenidos, solo el 27% tenían planes de atentados en EE UU.

Pero el gran problema es cuando alguno, como el miércoles, sí pasa a la acción. “El desafío es cómo identificas a esta gente. Incluso si los identificas, al final del día no puedes vigilar a tanta gente”, esgrime el experto, que explica que los yihadistas cambian sus perfiles en Internet y usan comunicaciones encriptadas. “Y la otra parte es algo ausente en América: la parte preventiva. También necesitas la implicación de comunidades, de la sociedad civil para tratar de convencer”.


A US study published in early December attempts to profile Islamic State (IS) group sympathisers in America, from those who merely post messages of support on Twitter to those planning an actual terrorist attack.

No one would have guessed that Mohammad and Jaelyn had secretly prepared for a honeymoon in Syria. Mohammad, 22, the son of a local imam, was about to graduate from Mississippi State University. Jaelyn, 19, a policeman’s daughter and former cheerleader, was studying chemistry. Yet these young Americans were dreaming of moving to the so-called caliphate proclaimed by the Islamic State group, also known as ISIS or ISIL.

Beginning earlier this year, their tweets had alerted the FBI. For four months, agents posing as jihadist sympathisers exchanged messages with the couple. Jaelyn, who goes by the alias “Aaminah al-Amriki”, boasts of her skills in maths and chemistry and says that her future husband wants “to join the mujahideen”. They vow to travel to Syria after their wedding: “Our story will be that we are newlyweds on our honeymoon.” On August 8, they left letters for their families and prepared to board a flight. They were apprehended at a small airport in Mississippi.

Their story made the headlines in the United States. Along with dozens of others, it was selected for a study by George Washington University that was published in early December and entitled "ISIS in America: From Retweets to
Raqqa”. About eight researchers, led by Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, looked into the rise of support for the Islamic State group in the United States, a phenomenon they said was “unprecedented”.

The group’s support has far exceeded that of al Qaeda, according to officials. FBI Director James Comey said in May that the group had hundreds, perhaps thousands, of supporters within the United States. The agency has already launched about 900 investigations into these potential recruits.

As of the fall of 2015, US authorities speak of some 250 Americans who have travelled or attempted to travel to Syria or Iraq to join the Islamic State group. And a record 71 US citizens or residents were convicted in connection with having ties with the Islamic State group since March 2014, including 56 in 2015 alone.

More isolated ‘jihadist scene’

"As in Europe, it is an extremely diverse group,” Lorenzo Vidino told FRANCE 24. “I would even say that this is more true in the US, and includes men, women, teenagers, 40-year-olds, petty offenders, doctoral students... "

The researcher notes two major differences between the United States and Europe. "The American ‘jihadist scene’, if it exists, is not only a lot smaller, but also more isolated. Those who are radicalised, online or in small groups, have trouble making an actual connection with ISIS, either for geographical reasons or because there aren’t the same recruitment networks that there are in Europe."  

The case of Alex, 23, is typical. This resident of rural Washington, who dropped out of school, was raised as a Christian by her grandparents. She says she lives "in the middle of nowhere" and had no connection to Islam. But in the summer of 2014, the filmed beheading of American hostage James Foley sparked a "horrified curiosity" in her.

After a few months, she began exchanging emails and communicating via Skype with members of the Islamic State group. Her new friends sent her money, gift cards and even chocolates. The young woman eventually embraced the ideology of the jihadist group. She announced her conversion on the Internet,
and within a few hours her number of followers had doubled. She then tweeted: "I actually have brothers and sisters. I am crying." While living this secret life she continued to teach in the family church on Sundays. When her grandmother learned of her conversion, Alex promised to stop. But the researchers are sceptical.

IS group exploits #BlackLivesMatter

Vidino’s team has identified 300 cases like Alex’s on Twitter. Many users attach a profile photo of their dead or arrested compatriots. And in a bizarre mix of genres, some use the image of the Detroit Lions football team, "combining a distinctly American pride in an NFL (National Football League) team and the popular Islamic symbol for bravery very frequently used by ISIS supporters".

Opposition to any Western intervention in Syria and the rejection of consumer society are the most common motivations, the researchers say. The Islamic State group also doesn’t hesitate to exploit popular hashtags expressing discontent in the United States. The organisation has tried to win the support of Muslim African Americans by using the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, which sprung up on Twitter after the deaths of several unarmed men at the hands of police. But according to Vidoni, there is "absolutely no evidence" that this approach has been effective.

In contrast, there are a small number of cases that become "very politicised and opposed to American society", Vidoni said. "Either because they believe it is racist – in Islam they find a message of brotherhood, a community where colour does not matter – or because they are anti-capitalist: environmentalists or activists from the Occupy movement."

Moner Abu Salha

Moner Abu Salha expressed this rejection in a more sentimental manner. The Floridian was, at 22, the first American killed in a suicide attack in Syria.

"I lived in America," he explained in a video in 2014. "I know how it is. You have all the fancy amusement parks and the restaurants and the food and all this crap and the cars. You think you're happy. You’re not happy. You’re never happy. I
was never happy. I was always sad and depressed. Life sucked."

And then there are the people who are searching for meaning. Raised in a poor evangelical family, Ariel Bradley was in a "perpetual quest for meaning", said a friend. "It was like, when I first met her she was a Christian, and then she was a socialist, and then she was an atheist, and then a Muslim."

Bradley fell in love with the owner of a pizzeria where she worked and converted to Islam to please him. The relationship did not last. In August 2011 she met an Iraqi man, and marriage and a child soon followed. In 2014 she went to Syria. Today she is still active on Twitter and Instagram, where she posted her support for the July attack in Chattanooga, her hometown, where a Kuwaiti-born gunman opened fire at two military sites killing four US Marines and injuring three others.

Agent provocateur

So how should the authorities react? One method that has seen some success is that of using an agent provocateur. This type of operation, which involves inciting a crime in order to catch a suspect in the act, is heavily criticised by some in the American Muslim community. Vidino said such operations had led to a significant number of criminal charges.

After Christopher Lee Cornell’s conversion to Islam, he increasingly isolated himself and developed an alter ego online, that of Raheel Mahrus Ubaydah. He made many virtual contacts, one of which was an undercover FBI agent. Cornell informs him of his intention to attack the US Capitol building in Washington. He is arrested in January 2015 after purchasing several semi-automatic rifles and 600 rounds of ammunition during an operation mounted by the FBI.

But it is often difficult for investigators to distinguish between cases that pose a real threat and those that do not. Two months before an attack in Garland, Texas, in which two gunmen were killed, Elton Simpson – an American who had converted to Islam and who was well known in jihadist circles – became very active on social media. One of his contacts, Mujahid Miski, tweeted 10 days before the attack about a contest on caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed planned in Garland: "The brothers from the Charlie Hebdo attack did their part.
It’s time for brothers in the #US to do their part,” he wrote.

Using his Twitter account Shariah Is Light, Simpson responded publicly to that call. On May 3, 2015, just minutes before the killing, he tweeted one last time using the hashtag #texasattack.

But even arrests will not be enough to counter the threat, Vidino said. “Moreover, many supporters of ISIS have not violated any law,” he added, “especially in the United States, with the First Amendment protecting freedom of expression”.

A more nuanced but hopefully more effective strategy must be put in place, he said. “We must involve communities, civil society, families, to prevent radicalisation from the start.”

To dissuade new recruits, Vidino said the testimonies of those would-be jihadists who have returned, disappointed, from Syria or Iraq could be helpful. Their stories, the study concludes, would likely resonate better with other aspiring jihadists than would any counter-propaganda coming from Uncle Sam.


By Emanuele Rossi

Settantuno persone americane sono sotto processo per aver collegamenti con lo Stato islamico, di questi 56 sono stati arrestati soltanto nel 2015: numero record dall’attentato del 9/11. L’età media di questi soggetti è 26 anni, e per circa l’86 per cento sono di sesso maschile: oltre la metà hanno cercato di viaggiare all’estero (Siria e Iraq) ma sono stati fermati in tempo. Un terzo di loro si crede avesse in mente dei piani per compiere attentati sul suolo americano. Sono questi alcuni dei dati, crudi, che escono dal report “Isis in America: from retweets to Raqqa”, redatto nell’ambito del Program on extremism della George Washington University dal ricercatore italiano Lorenzo Vidino e dal collega Seamus Hughes. Si tratta del più importante lavoro fatto finora sui
soggetti statunitensi che sono stati individuati per aver costruito del link con l’Isis, ed è basato su oltre 7000 pagine di documentazioni legali, ufficiali.

UN FENOMENO DIFFUSO

L’influenza della predicazione dello Stato islamico all’interno di numerosi Paesi occidentali, raggiunti non soltanto attraverso “guide spirituali” locali, ma anche tramite internet e i social media, ha alzato il livello del pericolo, rendendo chiunque un potenziale jihadista, vittima della propaganda del Califfato: è questo una delle motivazioni dietro alla creazione dei foreign fighters, i combattenti stranieri arrivati nel suolo siro-iracheno a combattere come soldati del Califfo. Gli Stati Uniti non sono stati immuni: si pensa che solo nel 2015 circa 250 persone abbiano lasciato il paese per unirsi al jihad dell’Isis; 9000 inchieste sono attualmente aperte contro simpatizzanti dello Stato islamico. Elementi finiti sotto le attenzioni delle autorità, ma certe volte riescono a sfuggire: è il caso, ultimamente, di Sayed Farook e sua moglie Tashfeen Malik, gli assassini del centro medico di San Bernardino.

Gli elementi studiati nelle 50 pagine di report hanno storie sparse per 21 dei 50 Stati americani: un fenomeno che si diffonde su tutto il territorio. La metà di questi sono stati fermati grazie ad operazioni che hanno coinvolto agenti dell’Fbi (è il Bureau ad occuparsi di queste pratiche. ndr) e all’uso della HUMINT, la Human Intelligence, ossia il ramo delle attività di intelligence che coinvolge direttamente gli agenti a terra (è ritenuto dagli esperti la principale delle attività necessarie per prevenire, termine centrale, le mosse dei terroristi: *ne aveva parlato a Formiche.net il Generale Luciano Piacentini, commentando gli attentati di Parigi il 13 novembre*).

PROFILI E MOTIVAZIONI

L’analisi delle vite degli attentatori che a metà novembre hanno sconvolto la Francia, colpendo la capitale, riconsegnava, in alcuni casi, per i soggetti coinvolti, profili particolari, legati all’esclusione socio-culturale delle banlieue parigine e di altre città francesi e belghe, spingendo ad una semplificazione: i terroristi sono disagiati sociali. Ma il report della George Washington Un. spiega che questo collegamento non è così diretto. I profili della 71 persone analizzate differiscono ampiamente per razza, età, classe sociale, istruzione, background famigliare. Contesti antropologici dall’escluso, il caso umano, al perfettamente integrato, quasi la metà sono convertiti: quasi tutti sono cittadini americani o residenti permanenti, carte verdi, lo step prima della cittadinanza. L’attualità ci conferma lo studio: *Farook, l’attentatore*.
**californiano** che ha colpito pochi giorni fa, era da cinque anni un ispettore della contea, un figlio di immigrati di origini pachistane, integrato (al di là di qualche screzio sul mondo del lavoro) che aveva raggiunto un impiego statale da circa 70 mila dollari l’anno. Questa eterogeneità, rende estremamente difficile un’analisi sui *big data*: il terrorismo ispirato dal Califfo non è un fenomeno facile da spiegare, delineare, controbattere, spiegano i ricercatori.

**IL RUOLO DEI SOCIAL MEDIA**

Secondo il report, i social media e la propaganda via internet giocano un ruolo cruciale nell’ambito della radicalizzazione dei “simpatizzanti” americani, e talvolta sufficiente di per sé a spingere ad organizzarsi per la mobilitazione. Il Program on extremism rileva che ci sono almeno 300 persone attive sui social media con profili pro-Isis: sono loro stessi che in molte circostanze si trasformano in reclutatori per il Califfo, diffondendone la propaganda, interagendo con individui simili a loro, particolarmente inclini alle istanze radicali islamiche, creando l’effetto d’indottrinamento. «Un’Eco online che alla fine permette il salto da guerrieri da tastiera a militanti veri e propri» scrivono Vidino e Hughes. La predicazione dell’imam yemenita di cittadinanza americana Anwar al Awlaki, qaëdista e non baghdadista, ha creato una cassa di risonanza talmente ampia che ancora oggi, a quattro anni dall’uccisione (colpito da un missile Hellfire sganciato da un drone decollato da una base segreta della Cia in Arabia Saudita), il 16 luglio di quest’anno, ha fatto da ispirazione per il ventiquattrenne di origini kuwaitiane che ha ucciso cinque Marines in una base per riservisti a Chattanooga, in Tennessee.

**Twitter.** Il social network preferito per le attività online, è Twitter, dove alcuni account di predicazione e propaganda vengono continuamente chiusi per essere poi riaperti sotto altri nomi, ma con gli stessi contenuti. Secondo il report dell’università di Washington, ci sarebbe una struttura fatta da tre livelli gerarchizzati e integrati: i “nodes“, nodi, farebbero da generatori dei contenuti iniziali (i predicatori veri e propri), mentre gli “ampliers“, gli amplificatori, si occuperebbero soltanto di retweettare i contenuti, e infine gli “sout-outs“ che avrebbero il compito di promuovere i nuovi link degli account che vengono chiusi.

**CONTATTI FISICI**

Ma la radicalizzazione degli americani inclini alle istanze del Calìffato non avviene soltanto via web. Esistono infatti elementi che permettono relazioni faccia a faccia, che spesso rafforzano direttamente ciò che i social media hanno
Attorno a questi elementi si concentrano le indagini dell’Fbi, in quanto si crede che sono coloro possano aver costruito contatti con elementi che si trovano nelle aree siro-irachene, e dunque potrebbero portare istruzioni e progetti di piani di attacco.


Parlamentní Listy: “‘Ze je Amerika,, za vodou?’ Nova fakta o nebezpečných muslimech”, December 7, 2015

Součástí studie byl příběh dvaadvacetiletého syna místního imáma Mohammadu a jeho o tři roky mladší přítelkyně Jaelyn, která byla dcerou policisty. Dříve vystupovala jako roztleskávačka a studovala chemii. Mladý pár plánoval svatbu a poté líbánky v Sýrii, kde chtěli oba mladí lidé bojovat pod vlajkou Islámského státu. Na sociálních sítích se svým plánem několikrát pochlubili, až uvízli v sítích
FBI. Po celé čtyři měsíce je sledovali agenti vydávající se za sympatizanty radikálního islámu. Na začátku srpna letosního roku napsali dopisy svým rodičům a připravovali se na odlet do Sýrie. Tam však neodjeli, protože je na jednom malém letišti v Mississippu zatkla zmíněná FBI.

Podle amerických úřadů výše zmíněný případ není rozhodně ojedinělý a podpora ISIS ve Spojených státech již dávno přesáhla podporu al-Káidy. Jak již před několika měsíců konstatoval šéf FBI James Comey, radikálové mají podporu stovek až tisíců Američanů. V současné době probíhá asi 900 samostatných vyšetřování spojených s radikálním islámem. Všeobecně se nyní hovoří asi o 250 Američanech, kteří odcestovali do Sýrie nebo Iráku a připojili se k Islámskému státu, či se o to pokusili. Z napojení na Islámský stát bylo od května loňského roku obviněno 71 Američanů, z toho 56 případů spadá do letosního roku.

Celý text v angličtině najdete ZDE.

„Stejně jako v Evropě, také v Americe se jedná o velmi různorodou skupinu. Mezi příznivci ISIS najdete muže, ženy, mládež, čtyřicátiny, manuálně pracující i studenty. Zásadním rozdílem je skutečnost, že skupina amerických džihádistů je mnohem menší a rovněž izolovanější než evropští džihádisté. Americkým džihádistům na sociálních sítích se daří jen velmi obtížně spojit se přímo s ISIS. Ať už to je kvůli přílišné vzdálenosti či také kvůli tomu, že ve Spojených státech neexistují takové náborové sítě jako v Evropě,“ konstatuje šéf výzkumné skupiny z univerzity George Washingtona Lorenzo Vidino.


Autoři studie z týmu Lorenzo Vidina jsou však skeptičtí. V průběhu několika posledních měsíců zaznamenali asi tři sta podobných případů. Mnoho z těchto lidí používá na sociálních sítích profilovou fotografii svých mrtvých či zatčených krajanů. „Někteří z nich na jednu stranu uznavají Islámský stát a na straně druhé se hrdě hlásí k americkému způsobu života a fandí například fotbalovému týmu.
Detroit Lions,” uvádí vědci konkrétní příklad s tím, že hlavní motivací příznivců ISIS z řad Američanů je nesouhlas se západní intervencí v Sýrii a také odmítání konzumní západní společnosti.

Islamistické skupiny rovněž neváhají využívat populárních hashtags, aby rozšířily okruh svých příznivců mezi Afroameričany. Nedávno to například byl hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, což volně přeloženo znamená „na černých záleží“. Podle Vidoniho však neexistují žádné důkazy o tom, že by byly snahy radikálů v tomto ohledu úspěšné. „Radikální islám také podporují různé skupiny, které považují americkou společnost za rasistickou, protože islamisté navenek hovoří o bratrství, ve kterém na barvě pleťi nezáleží. Další skupiny podporovatelů obecně broji proti kapitalismu a tvoří je různí ekologové a aktivisté z hnutí Occupy,” informuje Vidino.


Observador: “Redes sociais podem passer a determiner concessao de vistos nos EUA”, December 15, 2015

By Ana Pimentel

O departamento de segurança interna dos EUA está a planejar uma nova norma na concessão de vistos: verificar as conta sociais dos candidatos que querem residir em solo norte-americano.

Atualmente, o departamento já costuma verificar algumas contas em redes sociais como o Facebook ou Twitter, mas fá-lo de forma intermitente, como parte de três programas piloto que entraram em vigor no início do ano. A ideia é que esta pesquisa passe a ser uma regra, de acordo com fontes próximas do processo.

As redes sociais têm sido uma das ferramentas de divulgação preferidas de grupos terroristas como o Estado Islâmico e as autoridades têm seguido algumas contas de perto. O objetivo é que estas levem a encontrar pistas ou respostas para os atentados destes grupos.

O departamento de segurança dos EUA vai continuar a assegurar que qualquer utilização das redes sociais nos seus programas de veto é consistente com a
legislação atual e que tem em conta os direitos e liberdade civis bem como a proteção da privacidade”, afirmou a porta-voz Marsha Catron.

Esta terça-feira, a Câmara dos Representantes dos Estados Unidos vai votar um projeto de lei que exige que Barack Obama defina uma estratégia para combater o uso das redes sociais por terroristas. “Chegou a hora de esta administração deixar de se preocupar mais com a privacidade dos estrangeiros do que com a segurança dos americanos”, disse Michael McCau, representante do Texas.

O académico Lorenzo Vidino disse ao Wall Street Journal que esta verificação é algo que é “absolutamente” necessário, mas que é preciso que haja linhas orientadoras claras sobre o que é preocupante ou não”. Caso a medida avance, o departamento vai ter de decidir, por exemplo, quais são os países de maior risco e se deverá focar-se apenas nos cidadãos que chegam dessas geografias.

Um porta-voz do Facebook informou a publicação que a rede social já trabalha para notificar as autoridades de algumas atividades suspeitas na rede. “O Facebook tem tolerância zero para terroristas, propaganda do terror, ou para o louvar de atividade terrorista e trabalha agressivamente para removê-la da rede assim que tem conhecimento da sua existência”, afirmou.


In der Stadt Bern ist damit etwa die «Beratungsstelle gegen Radikalisierung» gemeint, welche gemäss ZaS dieses Jahr bereits sieben Fälle von religiös radikalierten und islamistisch motivierten Jugendlichen betreut hat. Nause beurteilt die Präventionsmassnahme, die vorab das Umfeld von potenziellen Jihadisten berät, als sehr wichtig. Allerdings verwehrt er sich dagegen, dass der Bund die Verantwortung auf die Kommunen abschiebt – und
fordert Unterstützung: «Wenn die Kommunen nicht tätig werden, gibt es keine Prävention. Das geht so nicht», so Nause gegenüber der SaZ. «Es wäre daher mehr als wünschenswert, dass sich der Bund hier engagiert.» (hjo)