

**TERRORIST GROUP EFFORTS IN THE HOMELAND AND  
THE STRATEGY TO COMBAT THEM**

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## **ABSTRACT**

While the U.S. continues to remain vigilant in fighting the war on terror abroad, homegrown terrorism within the U.S. has remained a growing concern. Homegrown terrorists are not leaving the U.S. to receive training; instead they are being pushed to embrace jihadist propaganda and motivated to the point of violent extremism within the U.S. These individuals have the ability to utilize the Internet to provide them the ammunition and knowledge needed to conduct attacks. This thesis addresses how terrorist groups exploit the Internet to radicalize and recruit U.S.-based individuals; and the proposed programs aimed at solving this problem. The first chapter answers the question of how U.S. based individuals are becoming radicalized, especially given the U.S. posture of preventing terrorists from infiltrating the homeland. In observing the root causes of radicalization and how the Internet has transformed the way in which terrorist groups spread propaganda, I hypothesize that U.S.-based individuals are susceptible to self-radicalization. Through case study analysis, I was able to confirm that my hypothesis was correct under certain circumstances, in that U.S.-based individuals do not need to belong to a terrorist group in order to become radicalized. The second chapter addresses the question of how individuals in the U.S. are being recruited. Again, there are limited opportunities for members of terrorist groups to actively recruit individuals in the U.S. without law enforcement or intelligence agencies being notified. By examining the types of recruitment models and grounds (locations) utilized by terrorist groups to attract

individuals, I hypothesize that terrorist groups primarily use the Internet to recruit individuals, thereby moving away from actual face-to-face interaction/recruitment methods. The case study analysis in this chapter disproved my hypothesis in that terrorist organizations primarily use the Internet to recruit because terrorist groups still prefer personal interactions via face to face to demonstrate the level of commitment by that group to the potential recruit. Using a case study comparison of three programs with different structures, the final chapter addresses how effective the CVE programs are in the U.S. By examining the current U.S. CVE strategy and some of the negative impacts that it has had on Muslim American communities, I hypothesize that government-led CVE programs contribute to the radicalization of individuals. While the case study results in this chapter indicate there may be connection between government led CVE programs and the alienation of Muslim communities, there is little to suggest these programs lead to the radicalization of individuals, thereby neither approving nor disproving my hypothesis. Each of the chapters addresses the threat of homegrown terrorism as fueled by terrorist groups and potential policy implications.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

While the threat of terrorism remains global, the U.S. has seen a growing trend of threats emanating on its own soil-the Boston Marathon bombing, the Fort Hood shooting, and the New York City underwear bomber, to name a few. In recent years, the number of homegrown terrorists residing within the confines of the U.S. has increased. Because terrorist organizations no longer need to be centrally located in order to recruit and radicalize individuals to conduct violent jihad, appealing to individuals abroad to conduct attacks (on their own accord) has lent further credence to their cause. As we continue to struggle with stopping Americans from leaving to fight with extremists in Syria and other areas of the Middle East, and mitigate the threat emanating from homegrown terrorists, it has become critical to understanding how individuals in the U.S. are radicalizing and being recruited while remaining in the confines of their homes.

The first chapter of my thesis addresses the question of how individuals in the United States are being radicalized by terrorist groups. In order to understand how an individual undergoes the radicalization process to end up a violent extremist, you need to first examine the root causes for radicalization.

Unfortunately, the root causes for radicalization in an individual are dependent upon multiple factors in their life that may serve as the catalyst for radicalization.

One of the root causes or a factor contributing to an individual's radicalization is the Internet. The Internet has changed the way in which individuals become radicalized-making information readily accessible to them. Jihadist websites, forums, chat rooms, and blogs, all provide information and messaging that

appeals to readers and can influence their decision-making. My hypothesis for this chapter is that individuals are becoming self-radicalized through Internet use and do not need to belong to terrorist group. I define self-radicalization as the process by which individuals have radicalized to a point of violent extremism, without any terrorist group affiliation. This means the individual does not belong or associate with any group and has the ability to carry out violent jihad on their own accord. Individuals can become self-radicalized by inundating themselves with enough information provided on the Internet to reach the point where they are radicalized. The findings from the case studies of this chapter suggest that combining the root cause or catalyst to spark interest in the individual and information received on the Internet can cause a U.S.-based individual to self-radicalize. The policy implications for this chapter suggest that the U.S. government intervene and closely monitor jihadist propaganda via the Internet without infringing on First Amendment rights. I also believe that the more jihadist propaganda that surfaces over the Internet will only breed more homegrown self-radicalized terrorists.

The second chapter of my thesis answers the question of how individuals in the U.S. are being recruited to terrorist groups. Nowadays, law enforcement officials and intelligence agencies are closely monitoring the activities of terrorist groups and areas within the U.S. (such as mosques, recreation centers, prisons, etc.), which make it difficult for terrorist groups to recruit members residing within the homeland. The bulk of this chapter is dedicated to discussing the different recruitment methods/models and grounds (locations) utilized by terrorist

groups to attract potential recruits. In this chapter, I hypothesize that terrorist organizations primarily utilize the Internet to recruit individuals today. Social media sites allow recruiters to attract followers and potential recruits without expending a great deal on time, money, and effort. The Internet has become the missing link in connecting like-minded individuals that may be located several continents away. The development of social media has also allowed terrorist groups to target individuals with specific backgrounds that may bring a wealth of knowledge or expertise in a given area, to their organization. While the case study analysis in this chapter disproves my hypothesis, it demonstrates that while the Internet is still widely used to recruit individuals to joining a terrorist organization, nothing replaces personal face-to-face interactions. As a policy implication, more resources need to be dedicated to figuring out which areas or communities have recruitment grounds, which serve as the location to recruit individuals to terrorist organizations from within the U.S. I also feel that by fostering better relationships between these communities and law enforcement, we will be postured to break up any future recruitment efforts and assist communities in fighting this problem.

In the last chapter of my thesis, I explore the U.S. Government's efforts in combating violent extremism (CVE) through the development of counter-radicalization and de-radicalization programs. While the goal of these programs is to change the belief system of an individual to reject extremist ideology, these programs are met with a host of inherent problems. In this chapter, I address the problem of whether the U.S. has been effective in combating violent

radicalization/recruitment in the homeland through the use of CVE programs. My hypothesis states that U.S. CVE programs alienate the communities in which they are being exercised in, and is contributing to the radicalization of individuals. Due to a generational gap within many of the Muslim Diaspora communities in the U.S., some individuals residing within these communities experience the difficulties of being caught between two cultures; some might even feel ostracized because of it. This can serve as the catalyst to start their radicalization process. Unfortunately, the case studies were not able to conclusively prove my hypothesis to be correct; however, I still feel there is a strong correlation between CVE programs alienating Muslim American communities and causing individuals in these communities to radicalize. The policy implication that I gathered from this chapter is that the U.S. Government needs to overhaul their CVE strategy and dedicate more resources to funding CVE programs. Because there were so few programs that exist regarding CVE, it was difficult to assess my hypothesis.

Each chapter of this thesis investigates understudied areas and cases, or offers a new analysis and methodology for previously studied topics to produce new information and insights. The subjects of each chapter relate directly to how the terrorist narrative impacts individuals located in the United States. In the first two chapters, I chose to study how the Internet plays a major factor in how individuals are involved in terrorist groups due to the amount of infobesity created by the Internet. The study of recruitment tactics, in the second chapter, as utilized by terrorist groups and previously popular physical locations for recruitment demonstrates the shift between online recruitment versus in-person. It also

demonstrates how the tactics of these two worlds of recruitment can be interchangeable. The third chapter then discusses the measures that the U.S. government is undertaking to combat the increase of homegrown terrorists. The structure of existing CVE programs was explored because there are valuable lessons that can be learned through the successes and failures of other programs.

The overarching theme for this paper is how the U.S. is combating terrorist groups in the homeland. This topic is of importance, as individuals residing within the U.S. continue to fall victim to jihadist propaganda and leave to join the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), al-Qaeda, or other terrorist groups. The U.S. needs to gain a better understanding of the root causes and motivations behind these individuals leaving and develop better strategies to combat homegrown terrorists. Being able to determine how an individual is radicalizing or how terrorist groups might be recruiting individuals, will better aid the U.S. in deterring these groups and develop better programs to assist in counter-radicalization efforts. This thesis aims to further the study of radicalization and recruitment efforts through Internet use with a focus on the implications for Western countries, specifically the United States.

**CHAPTER 1-**  
**SELF-RADICALIZATION: THE RESULT OF INFOBESITY**

In the past decade, terrorist organizations have shifted from being centrally located in one area to being spread over a multitude of geographic regions and several continents, thus making it difficult for governments to effectively employ counterterrorism measures. It has become important for terrorist organizations to attract like-minded members to carry out their message, regardless of their location. Since terrorist organizations have become geographically dispersed, radicalizing individuals to the point of carrying out extremist activities presents a challenge. The face-to-face interaction that was previously considered necessary in order to radicalize an individual has now become obsolete. In recent years, the process by which individuals in the United States become radicalized to a point in which they eventually join a terrorist organization has become a growing concern for U.S. security and intelligence agencies alike. It begs the question, “How are individuals in the United States becoming radicalized by terrorist organizations?”

Today, the Internet has become the primary facilitator in allowing terrorist organizations to expand their geographical reach, to include the United States. These organizations send messages, which are often cast to a wide net, but in recent years have aided in the radicalization of individuals residing in the United States. “In 2008, al-Qaeda’s core recognized that the Internet reduced the time and costs of operational communications while increasing the scope of information sharing among geographically disbursed groups.<sup>1</sup> Taking advantage of social networking sites, terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda have the ability

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The new Arena, the New Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2006), 115-116.

to spread its message, recruit, and radicalize individuals. Members of these organizations went from solely being on the receiving end to being active participants.<sup>2</sup> “Terrorists frequently use online tools for logistics and reconnaissance: They e-mail, chat, and instant-message; search for addresses and pictures; look up maps; and book flights online. None of these behaviors and activities, however, are unique to terrorists...they are difficult to distinguish from the online behaviors of ordinary people.”<sup>3</sup>

While the Internet has proven to be a worthwhile tool in aiding terrorist organizations to radicalize individuals, not every message these organizations send into cyberspace reach their intended recipients. This chapter explores the idea that individuals in the United States are becoming radicalized through a new term, as defined by literature, known as self-radicalization. The Internet now allows individuals to conduct extensive research into these organizations, sometimes providing them with a false sense of sympathy, which can serve as a catalyst for radicalization. The individuals’ perception of reality becomes skewed by their “larger than life” online persona, which in return provides them the confidence to radicalize. “The terrorist profile has increased in frequency with the advent of digital media, as radical Islamic videos can be found on YouTube and the al-Qaeda online magazine *Inspire* [which] can be accessed by anyone with an Internet connection.”<sup>4</sup> Social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Stout, Jessica M. Huckabey, John R. Schindler, and Jim Lacey, *The Terrorist Perspectives Project: Strategic and Operational Views of Al Qaida and Associated Movement* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Peter R. Neumann, “Options and Strategies for Countering Online Radicalization in America,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 36, iss. 6, 2013. p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> “The Challenges of Self-Radicalization to Domestic Security,” *The Atlantic Council of Canada*, July 15, 2013. <http://atlantic-council.ca/portfolio/the-challenges-of-self-radicalization-to-domestic-security/>

provide self-starters a forum to connect with individuals who maintain the same extremist beliefs. “As of May 2013, almost three quarters (72%) of online U.S. adults use social networking sites, [an increase] from 67% in late 2012.”<sup>5</sup>

The profile of individuals who utilize the Internet to radicalize is difficult to determine because reaching the point of radicalization for no two individuals is the same. However, examining an individuals’ background, the frequency to which they utilize the Internet, the websites they log-on to and post comments on, may assist in determining the rate at which these individuals radicalize. It will also assist in determining whether individuals in the United States are self-radicalizing via the Internet or if these individuals are more inclined to radicalize through direct outreach.

This chapter is composed of five main sections. First, it begins with a review of the literature on the root causes of radicalization and how the Internet has changed the radicalization process. Second, it describes the approach, a case study comparison, as the methodology best suited to assess my hypothesis. Third, I provide a detailed explanation for the case studies selected- Nadal Hassan, the Tsarnaev Brothers, and Zale Thompson- and examine these cases through the methodology set forth in the previous section. Fourth, I discuss the results and address similarities and differences between these cases, especially as they relate to my hypothesis. Finally, the chapter concludes with my thoughts on self-radicalization, as well as the need for future research and policy implications.

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<sup>5</sup> Joanna Brenner and Aaron Smith, “Report: Social Networking,” *Pew Internet and American Life Project*, August 5, 2013.  
[http://pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2013/PIP\\_Social\\_networking\\_sites\\_update\\_PDF.pdf](http://pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2013/PIP_Social_networking_sites_update_PDF.pdf)

## **THE PROCESS OF RADICALIZATION**

### *What is Radicalization?*

Radicalization is considered as the process by which individuals adopt new thoughts or behavior, often invoking extremist views. The definition of radicalization has been refined and redefined over the years; and is often considered ambiguous. Today, many definitions of radicalization refer to Islamic Terrorism as the end result of the process. One cannot limit the definition of radicalization as a means to Islamic Terrorism, thereby limiting the concept of radicalization. Radicalization goes beyond the process with an end in religious extremism/recruitment; radicalization can be applicable to political movements, which end result could be violence. For the purposes of this chapter, I define radicalization as the process that evokes feelings of violent extremism as the endpoint.

Experts such as Mandel believe the radicalization of an individual is delineated between those who start the process and those who actually commit to it.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the radicalization process goes beyond examining the individual and evaluates external factors influencing the individuals' cognitive processes. One must view the process of radicalization as a fingerprint or signature; no two signatures or fingerprints are alike, each is unique, as such is radicalization.

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<sup>6</sup> David R. Mandel, "Radicalization: What Does It Mean?" In T. Pick & A. Speckhard (Eds.) *Indigenous terrorism: Understanding and addressing the root causes of radicalization among groups with an immigrant heritage in Europe*. Amsterdam: IOS Press, 101.

McCauley and Moskalenko conceptualized the idea that the apex of a pyramid is similar to individuals who share their beliefs and feelings with terrorists. “From base to apex, higher levels of the pyramid are associated with decreased numbers but increased radicalization of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors. Thus one way of thinking about radicalization is that it is the gradient that distinguishes terrorists from their base of sympathizers.”<sup>7</sup> Since each individual has their own process of radicalization, one must then examine what causes individuals to radicalize to begin with.

#### *Root Causes of Radicalization*

There are many root causes that can be the contributing factor which cause individuals to radicalize. There is no one single issue/event/cause that can span across several radicalized individuals because each process is unique. Miller, Smelser, and Wiktorowicz, have each developed an approach, which supports the idea of root causes as a contributing factor to the radicalization in individuals. Miller’s Frustration-Aggression approach states whenever you see aggressive behavior; one must look for a frustration or tension causing this behavior, and vice-versa.<sup>8</sup> For example, whenever one sees terrorism, which is an aggressive behavior, one must look for the root cause. This theory is flawed because not every frustration necessarily leads to aggression. People may be frustrated, but that doesn’t mean they will always become aggressive.

Smelser’s “strain theory” suggests that strains, like frustrations, are the basis for aggression. The strain may be the basis of individual or group

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<sup>7</sup> Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways toward Terrorism.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20:415-33.

<sup>8</sup> Neal E. Miller, *Frustration and Aggression*. New Haven, CT US: Yale University Press, 1939.

dissatisfaction, leading to multiple collective responses.<sup>9</sup> For example, being upset about U.S. foreign policy may cause individuals to blow themselves up, but it may equally cause them to participate in a demonstration or sign petitions. All these responses are caused by strains, but not all of them are violent. This theory is flawed because the same root cause might lead to multiple outcomes; it is not a linear process.

Wiktorowicz developed the “cognitive opening” theory, as the root cause for individuals who had become radicalized. Wiktorowicz states that individuals create “cognitive openings,” which are periods in which individuals are willing to question their personal beliefs and is triggered by “structural driver”. These drivers could be political, economic, or social/cultural.<sup>10</sup> This theory suggests that personal experiences can influence an individual’s thought process during radicalization. Research suggests that cognitive opening theory happens more often than not in individuals.

Similarly to Wiktorowicz’s cognitive opening theory, Agnew’s general strain theory suggests strain caused on an individual due to exigent circumstances may assist in their radicalization. This theory suggests social structures within society may pressure individuals to commit crimes, or in this instance radicalize. Agnew suggested three parts to this theory<sup>11</sup>:

1. The failure to achieve positively valued goods.
2. The removal of positively valued stimuli.

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<sup>9</sup> Neil J. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior*. New York: Free Press, 1965.

<sup>10</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism In the West*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Vikram Rajakumar, “Alternative Perspectives on the Radicalization of Home-grown and ‘Leaderless’ Terrorists,” *CounterTerrorist Trends and Analysis*, vol. 5, iss. 8, August 2013, p. 20.

3. The presentation of negative stimuli.

“Agnew acknowledges that individuals have varying abilities to cope with stress, peer influence, past experiences, socio-economic status and financial circumstances. Along with these, ethnic minority status and religious, cultural, and linguistic differences between an individual and his peers will create strain on an individual in one way or another.”<sup>12</sup>

Sutherland’s Theory of Differential Association has provided insight as to how individuals might radicalize through interactions with other persons and within groups. “Differential association may vary in frequency, duration, and intensity. The extent to which criminal behavior is learned thus depends on how it is reinforced through the interactions that take place in personal groups.”<sup>13</sup> When an individual logs onto an extremist forum, which promotes violent jihad, an individual might become de-sensitized to committing violence because others are reinforcing the view.

Lastly, the Echo Chamber effect takes place in media to which “information, ideas, or beliefs are amplified or reinforced by transmission and repetition.”<sup>14</sup> “Participants in online communities may find their own opinions constantly echoed back to them, which reinforces their individual belief systems. This can create significant barriers to critical discourse within an online medium. The echo chamber effect may also impact a lack of recognition to large demographic changes in language and culture on the Internet if individuals only

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> John F Scruggs, “The Echo Chamber Approach to Advocacy,” *Philip Morris Companies Inc.* Washington, DC. Legacy Tobacco Documents Library: University of California, San Francisco, December 18, 1998.

create experience and navigate those online spaces that reinforce their world view.”<sup>15</sup> This theory is pretty self-explanatory as it relates to the radicalization of individuals via the Internet; individuals participate in online communities and forums only to connect with people who reinforce their own beliefs.

Root causes and the occurrence of terrorism work indirectly. Economic status, for example, doesn’t singularly cause terrorism; however, combined with other factors, may create a sense of social exclusion, which can then create the cognitive opening for radicalization. Root causes can be dynamic as there is no one single root cause that drives terrorism, but a combination. It is often root causes combined with strains/influences that perpetuate radicalization. Root causes are not sufficient enough alone to cause radicalization, but act as a catalyst in driving the radicalization process.

Since there is no one root cause or strain that explains radicalization, it becomes difficult to assess how individuals essentially become terrorists or adopt extremist views. Horgan, a psychologist, has dedicated research to suggest an all-encompassing terrorist profile does not exist. Only a small percentage of individuals “become radicalized to the point that they engage in terrorism.”<sup>16</sup> In identifying this small percentage, Horgan believes there are several predisposing factors for individuals to radicalize.

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<sup>15</sup> Kevin Wallsten, “Political Blogs: Is the Political Blogosphere an Echo Chamber?” *American Political Science Associations Annual Meeting*. Washington, DC: Department of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley. September 01, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> John Horgan, “From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 618, Terrorism: What the Next President Will Face (Jul., 2008), pp. 80-94

1. Emotional Vulnerability: Anger, Alienation, and Disenfranchisement are all root causes and provide strains for radicalization. Being uprooted, for example, displaced from your home, or longing for a sense of community, can contribute as root causes for one to radicalize.
2. Discontent: Current activity does not produce results through political or social means; terrorism becomes the necessary.
3. Identification with Victims: Individuals feel victimized through the actions of others. For example, a radicalized individual may identify with the suffering of others in a particular region.
4. Violence: The engagement of violence is not immoral.
5. Incentive: Individuals radicalize and join terrorist organizations to be a part of something greater. They believe they can achieve more during their death than life. An individual's involvement might also result in a higher status, additional respect, or authority. The incentives are presented stronger during the recruitment phase.
6. Kinship: Individuals with existing ties or friends/family who are members will want to pursue terrorist activities. Individuals who feel a kinship to members without knowing them or have gone through similar experiences also radicalize.

When combined, Horgan assesses these factors can provide the framework to understanding the root causes responsible for radicalization in individuals. These factors can act as a catalyst for involvement in a particular organization or group. Like Wiktorowicz's cognitive opening theory, these factors can trigger personal experiences recalled from memory, which may hold significant value.

Overall, for any given individual, becoming involved in terrorism will reflect a dynamic, though highly personalized, process of incremental assimilation and accommodation.”<sup>17</sup>

There are endless root causes that contribute to an individual radicalizing and eventually engaging in terrorist activities; however, once the individual has adopted or converted to a specific ideology that maintains extremist views, we must examine the method by which individuals then become recruited. One cannot assess by looking at an individual if he/she has become radicalized; through research we may be able to determine the methods by which individuals reach radicalization. For researchers, like Horgan, identifying how individuals become radicalized may prove more valuable than figuring out why people become involved.

In 2007, New York City’s Police Department (NYPD) developed a four-step process to determine how the process of radicalization leads to violent extremism. First, individuals lead their lives unaware or uninterested in violent jihad. Second, a catalyst or life-altering event leads them to reassess their life, and urges them to explore other ideologies. Third, individuals adopt the ideology and may undergo indoctrination. Lastly, the individual becomes radicalized and may consider themselves as violent jihadists. NYPD developed this model to assist in understanding the different phases; however, what this model is lacking is the fact that not every individual adheres to it. You may have some individuals skipping steps or reaching the third phase and deciding that becoming a violent jihadist isn’t worth the risk. This model does provide a basic understanding of the

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<sup>17</sup> Horgan, 85.

potential phases an individual might go through, which is important to understanding when assessing how an individual is reaching the point of radicalization.<sup>18</sup>

Personal ties and social relations are critical when individuals are becoming radicalized. Individuals' social environment, network, cliques, and virtual environment (Internet) are factors as to how an individual can become radicalized. Della-Porta and Diani argue individuals often become

“...involved in a collective action through their personal connections to people already involved. Those connections help them overcome the innumerable obstacles and dilemmas that people usually face when considering whether to become active on a certain cause. Not only that: the amount and type of individual networks also affect the chances of people remaining active for a long time, or instead reducing their commitment, or cutting it altogether... individuals not only become active in a movement through their previous connections, but also create new connections by the very fact of being involved in multiple forms of activism and associations. At the same time, though, ties resulting from overlapping memberships are not always restricted to organizations; individual movement activists are also frequently involved in countercultural or sub-cultural practices. This may take the form of ‘real life’ experiences, through personal participation in specific activities, but also develop through involvement in virtual communities, such as those made possible by the diffusion of computer-mediated communication.”<sup>19</sup>

In recent years, terrorist groups have been described as networks, like al-Qaeda. The idea is these groups are no longer structured through rigid organization, but are maintained through a network of individuals who know each other and share ideas. As far as radicalization is concerned, networks matter because they provide resources, expertise, and strategic direction. For example, those that join al-Qaeda's network may receive training or a predominant role

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<sup>18</sup> Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*, City of New York Police Department, Intelligence Division, New York, 2007, pp. 6-8, [http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths\\_blogs/files/NYPD\\_Report-Radicalization\\_in\\_the\\_West.pdf](http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blogs/files/NYPD_Report-Radicalization_in_the_West.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements*. Blackwell Publishing (2006): 134.

based on individual expertise. By being involved in a network, an individual is more likely to act and engage in violent extremism, rather than not act if an individual was on their own. The main takeaway is that networks facilitate the mobilization of individuals.

### *The Advent of the Internet and Radicalization*

For the past decade, the Internet has become one of the most effective tools terrorist organizations and networks utilize to radicalize and recruit individuals. “The Internet has become a fundamental aspect of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>20</sup> One must consider the Internet as the newest network in socializing and mobilizing individuals, with the widest audience. “The interactivity of chat rooms, blogs, social networking sites, message boards, video hosting sites, and e-mail blurs the lines between readership and authorship that previous generations of terrorists and sympathizers encountered with pamphlets, newspapers, and newsletters.”<sup>21</sup>

Some still believe that the radicalization process is completed when an individual is recruited and met with face-to-face interaction; however, with the advent of the Internet and new video applications, individuals no longer need to meet senior level leaders to become recruited or radicalized to an organization. Sageman had previously argued, “The fear that vulnerable young Muslims may be recruited to the jihad through Internet messages is overblown. Reading and sending messages about the jihad on the Internet may make these individuals

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<sup>20</sup> Christopher J. Lennings, Krestina L. Amon, Heidi Brummert, and Nicholas J. Lennings. “Grooming for Terror: The Internet and Young People.” *Psychiatry, Psychology, & Law*, Aug2010, Vol. 17 Issue 3, p. 424-437.

<sup>21</sup> Maura Conway, “Terrorism and Mass Communication: Nitro to the Net,” pp. 19-22.

receptive to its appeal, but direct involvement requires face to face interaction.”<sup>22</sup> However, in 2008, Sageman came to view the Internet as holding the global jihad movement together.<sup>23</sup> Sageman’s shift is a reflection of how the Internet went from an information delivery system to a virtual community providing real social interaction.

Neumann has characterized four distinct processes and dynamics to explain how individuals utilize the Internet to become radicalized:

1. Immersion- radicalization through immersion of extremist content for extended periods of time, “the amplified effects of graphic images and video, and the resulting emotional desensitization.”<sup>24</sup>
2. Social Environment- Internet forums create a social environment to which interactivity between members exists and individuals can change their mind; some can encounter heated exchanges with others and declare themselves as terrorists.
3. Role Playing- “Cyberspace enables people to role-play their idealized selves, projecting traits and characteristics they aspire to but do not possess.”<sup>25</sup> An individual might begin to recognize the gap between themselves and their alter ego and take steps to reconcile the gap.
4. Connection- this is the most basic process as it relates to online radicalization. The Internet connects people with similar interests. The “so-called

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<sup>22</sup> Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, p. 137.

<sup>23</sup> Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks In the Twenty-first Century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Peter R. Neumann, “Options and Strategies for Countering Online Radicalization in America,” p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

self-starters and people in remote areas rely on the Internet to link up with terrorist structures and turn their terrorist aspirations into reality.”<sup>26</sup>

### *Self-Radicalization*

More recently, the Internet has become fundamental in the development of a process defined as “self-radicalization”. The Internet offers would-be violent jihadists what has been described as a ‘de-formalized’ radicalization experience.<sup>27</sup> For the purpose of this chapter, I define self-radicalization as the process by which individuals have radicalized to a point of violent extremism, without any terrorist group affiliation. This means the individual does not belong or associate with any group and has the ability to carry out violent jihad on their own accord. Individuals can become self-radicalized by inundating themselves with enough information provided on the Internet to reach the point where they are radicalized. The self-starter doesn’t wait for instructions from a terrorist organization but can be inspired by their activities and want to carry out an attack on their own.

Self-starters’ lack ties to major international terrorist networks and do not receive orders from such organizations.<sup>28</sup> ‘Self-starters’ can also be considered lone-wolfs or those committing acts “alone”. However, in the “age of social media, people on the Internet may be physically on their own but they are far from lonely. The degree of social interaction and connectivity they experience in

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 425.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 415.

extremist online forums may...be higher than with some of the people they are closest to physically.”<sup>29</sup>

In recent years, it has become difficult to distinguish between individuals who have become self-radicalized and carry out attacks on their own, without being a member or recruited into a terrorist group; versus those who are pretending to carry out attacks alone, when in fact those individuals are members of a terrorist group and are acting on their behalf. I will utilize the term “poser” to identify these individual pretending to act on his or her own. These posers could have been funded by terrorist organizations or given a plan to execute, which was not developed entirely on their own. Self-radicalized posers are often linked into extremist subcultures through the Internet, or contact with people abroad. The Internet assists in the facilitation of bringing like-minded individuals together. Individuals posing as self-radicalists, utilize made-up personas to push an individual to commit jihad on behalf of the prescribed terrorist organization. These individuals are not truly acting alone when they are being coaxed or recruited by someone in an extremist forum to commit an act of violence.<sup>30</sup> It is important to note that contact with individuals who share the same extremist views might not always be located abroad. The Internet has the ability to diminish any geographic barriers. The Internet has created a fantasy world for individuals with a desire for acceptance and connection to others of similar like-mindedness, fueled by online instigators.

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<sup>29</sup> Peter R. Neumann, “Boston, ‘Lone wolves’ and ‘self-radicalization’,” *Bipartisan Policy Center*, April 30, 2013. <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/2013/04/boston-lone-wolves-and-self-radicalization>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

People may be acting independently when they access the Internet, sitting in their bedrooms, but they are not necessarily alone. Individuals can experience social interaction and community when they are part of online forums, for example. These individuals have the ability to access mass quantities of information through the Internet, become self-radicalized, then prepare or commit violent acts in support of a terrorist organization or group without being involved in its command structure or receiving assistance from the organization.

After reviewing the perceived wisdom in current literature, the role of the Internet in radicalizing individuals is limited because social media and online networking is constantly changing. Terrorist organizations and individuals adjusting to that change may find difficulties, especially in geographical areas in which technology operates intermittently. It is also incredibly difficult to have a streamlined radicalization process because, as previously stated, the process is different for each individual. When examining cases in which the Internet has had some role in radicalization, there are a multitude of factors that affect each individual. Lastly, very little research, literature, and evidence suggest individuals self-radicalize, or it may be difficult to determine if an individual truly self-radicalized without the help of outside influences. Drawing upon published research, additional analysis and further research is needed in this area.

Based on these shortcomings, there are gaps that currently exist in literature on the role that the Internet plays in facilitating individuals who seek out information and become radicalized without the assistance or membership from an external organization. This paper stands to suggest that individuals in the

United States utilize the Internet to assist in their self-radicalization. Individuals, who have self-radicalized, have experienced one of the root causes (as previously described), which have contributed to the process of their radicalization. The combination of root causes and Internet use helps facilitate the process of self-radicalization.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology used to identify whether individuals in the United States are susceptible to self-radicalization through Internet use is a case study comparison between the more recent arrest of Zale Thompson-2014 NYC Ax Attack, the Tsarnaev brothers-2013 Boston Marathon bombing, and Major Nadal Hasan-2009 Fort Hood Shootings. I chose these three case studies because they all centered on individuals who have been characterized as being homegrown terrorists. I also chose cases that occurred within the past several years, as the number of homegrown terrorists has increased within the U.S.

Within these case studies, I closely examine the root causes that served as the catalyst for beginning the radicalization process. From there, I utilized research of scholarly articles to build a case as to whether or not the individual utilized the Internet and in what capacity. If an individual had direct contact with members of a terrorist organization who assisted in planning, conducting, or suggesting attacks, I don't believe they would be considered self-radicalized. However, if the individual was acting on their own accord when carrying out an attack, without the orders or instruction from members of a terrorist group, then they can be considered self-radicalized.

The case for self-radicalization gained notoriety after the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, as President Obama outwardly stated that the Tsarnaev brothers were a case of self-radicalized individuals who utilized the Internet to further their hatred towards the United States. This case had created awareness for the term self-radicalization; however, it was still disputed as not being credible. The Boston bombing case is unique to this study because it involves two individuals (the Tsarnaev brothers) who are said to have been self-radicalized through the Internet, not an individual acting alone. However, I chose to focus on the younger Tsarnaev brother, Dzhokhar, for my case study because the facts surrounding these two brothers and their radicalization processes are differing and competing. This case study will be tested against the hypothesis to determine whether or not this case suggests individuals who do not act alone can be self-radicalized through the Internet.

In the more recent case of Zale Thompson, I chose to test this case against my hypothesis because this case has been more recently referenced as identifying an individual within the U.S. as being self-radicalized. This case serves as the model to test against the other cases because Thompson outwardly utilized the Internet to self-radicalize and eventually conduct an attack. In my opinion, this is one of the strongest cases to date of self-radicalization and since this case occurred in October 2014, it only stands to reason to suggest that the U.S. may continue to see more individuals and cases like this in the future.

In the case of Major Nadal Hasan, he had established an online presence in extremist forums and had been radicalized through Internet use; however, it is

important to distinguish that Hasan also had communications with senior level terrorist organization leadership abroad, which could question whether or not he was truly self-radicalized. This could make Hasan part of the group of individuals posing to be self-radicalized, as previously discussed.

In all three of these case studies, it will be important to examine what websites the individuals logged on to and frequency to which they logged on to the Internet, this may prove to be difficult as not all of these are present in research and are not readily accessible as they require information gathered from National Security Letters (NSL) provided by service providers and issued by law enforcement during the discovery process. It is important to compare the backgrounds of these individuals, check for similarities, and figure out the root cause that served as the catalyst for beginning their radicalization process. Then, I must determine when combining the Internet use, root cause, and all other factors, if the individual was self-radicalized. Lastly, in order to combine these case studies and test them against the hypothesis, it will be necessary to link these individuals to networks and other individuals of notoriety in that particular ideology, if applicable in each case.

## **DATA**

### *Major Nidal Hasan-2009 Fort Hood Shootings*

On November 5, 2009, Major Nidal Hasan opened fire at the Solider Readiness Center at Fort Hood, Texas, killing 13 people and injuring an additional 31. In the months leading up to the shooting, colleagues noted that Hasan had not acted any different than normal. So then how did Hasan reach a

point of radicalization, which concluded in violence? Hasan was raised by his Palestinian parents in the U.S., attended Virginia Tech, and joined the U.S. Army. While in the Army, Hasan attended medical school and “became one of the few psychiatrists in the military”.<sup>31</sup> While completing his residency at Walter Reed Military Hospital in Washington, DC, Hasan conducted extensive research in the internal conflict Muslim-Americans face while fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. “His disenchantment was...deep...and shaped for him a growing religious fervor.”<sup>32</sup>

In 2001, Hasan met radical Yemeni-American imam, Anwar al-Awlaki, while attending his mother’s funeral at the “Dar al-Hijrah Mosque in Falls Church, Virginia.”<sup>33</sup> Several years had passed since Hasan had spoken to Awlaki, until December 2008, when Hasan began emailing Awlaki. Most of the emails that were discovered (in connection to an Awlaki investigation by the Joint Terrorism Task Force in San Diego) contained questions regarding research Hasan was conducting in his position as a psychiatrist at Walter Reed.<sup>34</sup>

“Although Hasan harbored radical ideas prior to renewing communications with Awlaki...the online communications are possibly significant in his decision to take action.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Jeremy G. Carter and David L. Carter, “Law enforcement intelligence: implications for self-radicalized terrorism,” *Police Practice and Research*, vol. 13, no. 2, April 2012, p. 149.

<sup>32</sup> Scott Shane and James Dao, “Investigators Study Tangle of Clues on Fort Hood Suspect,” *The New York Times*, November 15, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> “Profile Anwar al-Awlaki,” *ADL*, November 2011. <http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/combating-hate/anwar-al-awlaki-2013-6-4-v1.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Carter and Carter, “Law enforcement intelligence: implications for self-radicalized terrorism,” p. 149.

<sup>35</sup> Peter K. Foster, “Countering Individual Jihad: Perspectives on Nidal Hasan and Colleen LaRose,” *Global ECCO*, Vol. 2, No. 4, November 2012. <https://globalecco.org/countering-individual-jihad-perspectives-on-nidal-hasan-and-colleen-larose>

“Major Hasan appear[ed] deeply engaged with applying religious values to violence,”<sup>36</sup> in the e-mails between him and Awlaki. “In the Web posting investigators believe was his, Major Hasan suggested that a suicide bomber might have just as noble a purpose as a soldier who throws himself on a grenade to protect his comrades.”<sup>37</sup> Through radical forum postings and on-line sermons, Hasan began to feel a connection to supporting violent jihad and the extremist ideology rhetoric.

In July 2009, “Major Hasan was sent to Fort Hood, the largest Army post, bustling with the work of war and surrounded by the scruffy trappings of an Army town: pawnshops and payday loan outlets, beer joint and tattoo parlors.”<sup>38</sup> The unfamiliar change in scenery and growing anti-American sentiment aided Hasan in becoming a more devout Muslim. He began praying five times a day.<sup>39</sup> It wasn’t until Hasan learned that he would be going to Afghanistan to aid in the war that he decided to commit violent jihad.

#### *The Tsarnaev Brothers- 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing*

On April 15, 2013, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, with the assistance of his brother, Tamerlan, were responsible for the Boston Marathon bombing resulting in the deaths of five individuals and injuries of 264 others.<sup>40</sup> The Tsarnaev brothers immigrated to the United States as refugees in 2002. The brothers were born into a traditional Muslim family. Tamerlan (the older Tsarnaev brother), had problems with integrating into

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<sup>36</sup> Shane and Dao, “Investigators Study Tangle of Clues on Fort Hood Suspect.”

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Deborah Kotz, “Injury toll from Marathon bombs reduced to 264,” *The Boston Globe*, April 24, 2013. <http://www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/health-wellness/2013/04/23/number-injured-marathon-bombing-revised-downward/NRpaz5mmvGquP7KMA6XsIK/story.html>

American society. In 2012, Tamerlan traveled to Russia, where he was exposed to the extremist Islamic ideology and became radicalized.<sup>41</sup>

For Dzhokhar, his life had been the opposite of Tamerlan's. Dzhokhar was social and popular among his peers. He was well educated and attended the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth for marine biology. However, it had been discovered on the Russian-language social-networking site "VK", Dzhokhar maintained Islamist views. He posted links to Islamic websites, videos of fighters in the Syrian civil war, and to pages advocating independence for Chechnya (his father's home country). Dzhokhar was also active on Twitter and on the day of the 2012 Boston Marathon, a year before the bombings; Dzhokhar's Twitter feed mentioned a Koran verse often used by radical Muslim clerics and propagandists.<sup>42</sup>

The Tsarnaev brothers had relied heavily on one another throughout plotting the Boston bombing. While Tamerlan had been radicalized through face-to-face contact, it was his brother Dzhokhar that became self-radicalized via the Internet. According to FBI interrogators (who were only able to interview Dzhokhar because Tamerlan was shot while being apprehended), Dzhokhar claimed that he and his brother were motivated by extremist Islamic beliefs and were not connected to any known terrorist groups. Dzhokhar was angered by U.S. involvement over the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which had only been fueled with images and forums on the Internet. Dzhokhar said he and his

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<sup>41</sup> "Timeline: A Look at Tamerlan Tsarnaev's Past," *CNN*, April 22, 2013.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2013/04/21/us/tamerlan-tsarnaev-timeline/index.html#em0>

<sup>42</sup> Jenna Russell, Jenn Abelson, Patricia Wen, Michael Rezendes, and David Filipov, "Brothers veered violently off track," *The Boston Globe*, April 19, 2013. Accessed September 14, 2013. <http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2013/04/19/relatives-marathon-bombing-suspects-worried-that-older-brother-was-corrupting-sweet-younger-sibling/UCYHkiP9nfsjAtMjJPWJL/story.html>

brother wanted to defend Islam from the U.S., which conducted the Iraq War and War in Afghanistan, in the view of the brothers, against Muslims.<sup>43</sup>

#### *Zale Thompson-2014 NYC Ax Attack*

On October 23, 2014, Zale Thompson attempted to hack two cops in Queens, New York utilizing an ax. “Thompson was shot dead after running up to four officers in New York brandishing a hatchet, before wounding cop Kenneth Healey, 25, in the head, and slashing another in the arm.”<sup>44</sup> While detectives figure out the motives behind this attack and piece together Thompson’s life, they have discovered that in the nine months leading up to this attack, Thompson visited 277 jihadist websites and conducted searches on beheadings, al-Qaeda, ISIS, and jihad. During a search warrant on Thompson’s home computer, investigators had also found a manifesto, which he describes, his hatred towards the government and aspirations of conducting an attack.<sup>45</sup> Five days before the attack was conducted, Thompson reportedly “locked himself inside a room at his father’s house where he read jihadi websites.”<sup>46</sup> Shortly after, his father ended up kicking him out of the house. Currently, little information exists as the investigation is ongoing and additional information will be forthcoming.

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<sup>43</sup> Julie Weiner, “Dzhokhar Tsarnaev’s Possible Motive: Anger Over Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan,” *Vanity Fair*, April 25, 2013, <http://www.vanityfair.com/online/daily/2013/04/dzhokhar-tsarnaev-s-possible-motive-anger-over-wars-in-iraq-and-afghanistan>

<sup>44</sup> Chris Pleasance, “Hatchet-Wielding Muslim Radical who Attacked Rookie New York Cops ‘Spent Months visiting Jihadist Websites and Stalked Officers for Hours’,” *UK Daily Mail*, November 4, 2014. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2820584/Hatchet-wielding-Muslim-radical-attacked-rookie-New-York-cops-spent-months-visiting-jihadist-websites-stalked-officers-hours.html>

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> “Axe attacker Zale Thompson’s Chilling Manifesto,” *Yahoo7News*. November 4, 2014. Accessed October 31, 2014. <https://au.news.yahoo.com/world/a/25426697/axe-attacker-zale-thompsons-chilling-manifesto/>

## **DISCUSSION**

Based upon the research presented above, very little research and evidence suggests that individuals self-radicalize without the help of outside influences and a root-cause or factor that begins their radicalization process. Unfortunately, some of the cases selected proved that outside influences were a factor in the individuals' self-radicalization process. However, it may still be possible that self-radicalization can occur, depending on specific circumstances, such as the case of Zale Thompson.

In each case, the Internet aided the individual in reaching a point of radicalization to which they became violent extremists. These U.S.-based individual(s) utilized the Internet for e-mail contact with individual's abroad, information gathering/sharing, web forums use, and reinforcing (in most cases) the Islamic extremist ideology. However, in each case study, the individuals did not identify themselves as belonging to a particular terrorist organization nor does evidence suggest they belonged to one. This research is important, as it demonstrates that individuals are radicalizing through the Internet regardless of whether or not they are acting alone.

The case study on Hasan demonstrates how he utilized the Internet to become immersed in Awlaki's sermons and postings, eventually e-mailing Awlaki to gain further understanding of the jihadist message. Though located in two separate geographical locations, Hasan was able to get the validation needed from Awlaki to commit violent jihad. Hasan's mother's death combined with his anti-American stance of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan may have served as the

catalyst/root cause that contributed to Hasan's radicalization. "While reports indicate that al-Awlaki did not order Hasan to take action, when understood within the context of al-Awlaki's ability to inspire individuals to violent action, his counsel was likely influential."<sup>47</sup> However, Hasan acted alone during the Fort Hood shootings and was not a part of a broader terrorist plot.<sup>48</sup> "The imam's direct contact with Hasan inspired Hasan to self-directed action."<sup>49</sup>

The case study of the Tsarnaev brothers demonstrates that if an individual does not have the network/organization around them to support their radicalization process, then their chances of turning to the Internet increase. While Tamerlan was able to radicalize through the normal face-to-face social interaction in Russia, Dzhokhar turned to Twitter and online forums to support his ideological beliefs and self-radicalize. However, the argument might be made in this case that Tamerlan could have also influenced Dzhokhar to radicalize, which would disprove the hypothesis. The case of the Tsarnaev brothers is considered controversial because it could be argued that Dzhokhar was self-radicalized while Tamerlan wasn't, or it could be argued that Dzhokhar was radicalized through Tamerlan.

Lastly, the case study of Thompson clearly demonstrates how an individual can become self-radicalized as a result of infobesity. One important point to be made for this case was that Thompson's attack follows on the heels of two attacks against Canadian Parliament in Canada and a beheading of a woman in Oklahoma conducted in early October 2014. According to an October 2014

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<sup>47</sup> Foster, "Countering Individual Jihad: Perspectives on Nidal Hasan and Colleen LaRose."

<sup>48</sup> Carter and Carter, "Law enforcement intelligence: implications for self-radicalized terrorism," p. 149.

<sup>49</sup> Foster, "Countering Individual Jihad: Perspectives on Nidal Hasan and Colleen LaRose."

joint FBI/DHS bulletin, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) issued a message to individuals in Western countries to carry out lone-wolf style attacks against law enforcement and intelligence community members.<sup>50</sup> If Thompson had seen this message posted on social media or jihadist websites, he could have utilized it as the impetus for his attack; however, authorities investigating the case continue to argue that his attack was conducted alone and without specific direction from a terrorist group. This case establishes how dangerous individuals who become self-radicalized can be, especially since they go undetected in some instances and we don't learn about them until after the fact.

The term self-radicalization refers to the process by which individuals have radicalized to a point of violent extremism, without any terrorist group affiliation. This means the individual does not belong or associate with any group and has the ability to carry out violent jihad on their own accord. In all cases, these individuals lacked ties to major international terrorist networks and did not receive orders from them. For Hasan, communicating with Awlaki may have given them the extra push they needed to commit violence or further the jihadist message through the Internet. Typically, when an individual radicalizes then becomes recruited into a terrorist organization, it is easier for them to commit acts of violence when they are told by someone else to do so.

In each of these case studies, each of the theories previously mentioned in the "Theory and Hypothesis" section are prevalent, especially the cognitive opening theory. In each case, the individual had a root cause as to why they

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<sup>50</sup> "Feds Warn of ISIS-Inspired Threat Against Police, Reporters in US," *NBC News*. October 13, 2014. Accessed October 31, 2014. <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/feds-warn-isis-inspired-threat-against-police-reporters-us-n224826>

radicalized, and in some instances, like Hasan's, it was a memory/event, which aided in igniting the radicalization process. The echo chamber theory was noticeable in all cases; one can imagine that when these individuals were engaging in social interaction on the Internet, it was only reinforcing their extremist view, especially when their reality is an opposing view.

Therefore, in all cases combined with the multiple theories as previously defined, the hypothesis was supported. However, the naysayers of self-radicalization believe that being under the influence of a terrorist group is the same thing as being radicalized by them; therefore, discrediting the theory of self-radicalization. Yet these actors all committed crimes alone, without the direct assistance from a terrorist organization, and their plots were not suggested by anyone other than themselves which proves the hypothesis- individuals in the U.S. can be self-radicalized through the Internet. It is difficult to determine if individuals are self-radicalizing before an event occurs unless law enforcement is tracking them.

As previously stated, very little research and evidence suggests individuals self-radicalize without the help of outside influences and a root cause or factor that begins their radicalization process. Unfortunately, the cases selected proved that outside influences were a factor in the individuals' self-radicalization process. This finding may not be obtainable due to the multiple theories previously stated; all theories reflect an outside influence as the cause/actor in one's process to reach radicalization.

## CONCLUSION

As debates continue regarding whether individuals have the ability to become self-radicalized without the influence of outsiders through the use of the Internet, my main argument has become individuals are radicalizing through Internet use regardless of whether or not they are acting alone. In recent years, the Internet has provided a community with social interactions with the beginning of video chat websites such as Skype. With the development of social media applications, more individuals have inspired to become active Internet users. “People living in the U.S. and other Western countries, where the Internet is available to the entire population, are more likely to be recruited and radicalized via the Internet.”<sup>51</sup> In my case study and discussion sections, I draw a distinction between those who are directed by the leadership of an organization and those who act on their own. This distinction is important because it helps distinguish between individuals who are self-radicalized and those who are traditionally recruited by organizations through the Internet.

“Al-Qaida’s efforts to recruit and radicalize Westerns are evident in their online magazine, *Inspire*, intended for young men in English-speaking countries to self-radicalize and become one of the multitudes of homegrown terrorists who will carry out attacks against the West, especially in the United States.”<sup>52</sup> But just like its name suggests, *Inspire*, individuals feel they can commit these acts of violence without actually belonging to the organization. I believe this is a benefit to terrorist organizations, as they can take credit for jihadist events without their

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<sup>51</sup> Robin Thompson, “Radicalization and the Use of Social Media,” *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 4, Iss. 4, 2011, p. 172.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

direct involvement. It makes it cheaper for terrorist organizations to claim responsibility for an attack carried out by an individual that has self-radicalized versus someone directly involved in the organization.

The research in this chapter adds to the little research already conducted on self-radicalization and seeks to inform self-radicalization disbelievers that such a thing does exist. Since the case studies presented in this paper reflect high-profile cases since 2009, it stands to reason that the U.S. will continue to battle the ongoing problems associated with individuals who utilize the Internet to self-radicalize. Due to the constant changes and developments of new web applications, terrorist networks, like al-Qaeda, will continue to utilize the Internet to subconsciously push out their message to users and develop new plans to attack Western interests. This research also opens up the broader question as to what the U.S. is doing to safeguard the Internet so more individuals do not become self-radicalized and become homegrown terrorists. It also begs the question what programs and policies the U.S. is undertaking to stop radicalization efforts and de-radicalize individuals.

## **CHAPTER 2-**

### **#HOWTOJOINJIHAD: SOCIAL NETWORK AS A RECRUITING TOOL**

Over the past decade, the United States has become increasingly reliant on the technological advancements that connect individuals to the Internet. The Internet has changed the way in which society operates on a daily basis and has become an instrumental tool in the way in which individuals communicate across the globe. According to Nielsen Online, almost 34% of the world and 79% of North America had Internet access as of June 2012, which is approximately a 153% increase from 2000 for world usage. Of note, in the Middle East approximately 40% of individuals had Internet access, which is an increase of 2,340% from 2000.<sup>53</sup> The increase in numbers demonstrates how the Internet has become a necessity for societies.

As the Internet plays an essential function in connecting individuals' across the globe, there is an underlying, growing concern that the Internet is being abused. Today, terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda, have demonstrated that while they may be decentralized, they are more connected than ever. The Internet has become a vital tool in al-Qaeda operations, helping it gain sympathizers, maintaining its decentralized structure, calling members to action, and fundraising to support its mission.<sup>54</sup> "This reliance on the free access and use of the Net is also one of the main reasons why, despite the many blows that it received since 9/11, the organization's operational capabilities have not truly diminished."<sup>55</sup> The utilization of the Internet has allowed al-Qaeda to develop a virtual network of networks.

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<sup>53</sup> "Internet Users in the World." *Internet World Stats Usage and Population Statistics*. Accessed 28 April 2014, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats>.

<sup>54</sup> Gabriel Weimann, "WWW.AL-QAEDA: The Reliance of al-Qaeda on the Internet, *NATO Science for Peace and Security Series-E: Human and Societal Dynamics*. (2008): 61-69.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

In 2007, approximately 5,500 terrorist websites existed, which demonstrates an exponential growth from only 12 websites in 1998.<sup>56</sup> This increase in terrorist websites demonstrates the popularity the Internet has played in activities being conducted by terrorist organizations and the Internet's ease of use. The Internet has become an attractive solution to many of al-Qaeda's problems. Primarily, the Internet offers terrorist organizations:

- easy access;
- little or no regulation, censorship, or other forms of government control;
- potentially huge audiences spread throughout the world;
- anonymity of communication;
- fast flow of information;
- interactive communication;
- inexpensive development and maintenance of a web presence; and
- a multimedia environment (the ability to combine text, graphics, audio, and video and to allow users to download films, songs, books, posters, and so forth).<sup>57</sup>

Because al-Qaeda can no longer reside in a centralized location such as Afghanistan, the organization has relocated to cyberspace to conduct training, research the enemy, spread messaging, and gain membership. By inspiring individuals in geographically disperse locations through jihadist websites; al-Qaeda has the ability to act globally and create a "virtual training camp".<sup>58</sup> With this, terrorist groups are now turning to the Internet as the newest tool to vet and recruit individuals. By recruiting through the Internet, terrorist groups cut down on costs, time, and effort that it takes to recruit an individual through face-to-face interaction. This chapter seeks to discuss how terrorist groups are utilizing the

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<sup>56</sup> Gabriel Weimann, *WWW.Terror.Net: How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet*. United States Institute of Peace. (2004).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

Internet to recruit individuals within the U.S. and circumvent authorities that may be monitoring group activities within the homeland.

This chapter is comprised of five main sections. First, I begin with discussing the existing literature on the different models that terrorist groups utilize to attract potential recruits and the pre-existing factors that act as the grounds for recruitment. Second, I utilize a case-study comparison to assess my hypothesis, which determines whether or not the Internet has become the primary tool exploited by terrorist groups for recruitment. Third, I provide a detailed explanation for the case studies selected- Abu Hamza al-Masri, Omar Hammami, and Faisal Shazad, and examine these cases through the methodology set forth in the previous section. Fourth, I discuss the results and address the similarities and differences between these cases, especially as they relate to my hypothesis. Finally, the chapter concludes with my thoughts on how terrorist organizations will continue to ramp up online recruitment efforts in order to maintain their operations and global posturing.

## **THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS**

Recruitment is the process by which individuals are sought after to join a specific organization or group. Recruiters may actively seek out individuals with a specific set of skills or certain characteristics to compliment the groups pre-existing skill set or contribute further. Prior to the advent of the Internet, individuals relied heavily on face-to-face rapport building, word-of-mouth, and peer association in order to solicit new members into joining an organization. The days in which al-Qaeda recruiters were presented the opportunity to openly recruit individuals face-to-face has passed, especially within the confines of the United States. The Internet has thus become an instrumental in implementing recruitment efforts.

In the instance of al-Qaeda or other terrorist organizations, “recruitment provides the killers, the suicide bombers, the kidnappers, the executioners, the engineers, the soldiers, and the armies of future terrorism.”<sup>59</sup> “A common misperception about extremist groups is that they enlist any willing person they can put their hands on. In reality, recruiting is very dangerous. The recruiter can be captured when approaching strangers and the whole organization will suffer if the latest recruit turns out to be an informant.”<sup>60</sup> According to a New York Police Department study, “an individual must first be exposed to extremist ideology, and then consciously identify with it, before finally submitting themselves to a long process of intense indoctrination.”<sup>61</sup> “An individual may be willing, suitable, and

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<sup>59</sup> Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet* (Washington DC: USIP Press, 2006): 48.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, “The recruiter’s dilemma: Signalling and rebel recruitment tactics,” *Journal of Peace Research*, (2012): 3-16.

<sup>61</sup> Andrew Dornbierer, “How al-Qaeda Recruits online,” *The Diplomat*. September 13, 2011.

‘biographically available’ for recruitment, but will not be able to join unless he/she is physically located and accepted by a recruiter.”<sup>62</sup>

Since there is no one designated path to which al-Qaeda utilizes to recruit individuals, recruiters rely heavily on certain psychological variables combined with carefully constructed messaging/branding, as to often lure individuals into being recruited. While al-Qaeda’s recruiters may look for inherent traits such as individuals with a background in computer science or engineering, recruiters often seek to target individuals who are easily susceptible to their message.

Brady, Schlozman & Verba, who studied recruitment...argued that recruiters maximize the likelihood of successful persuasion by seeking subjects with certain qualities, such as past activity, resources and engagement with politics. However, they face an information problem in that such attributes are mostly unobservable. Recruiters look for observable traits correlated with the unobservable ones. They also exploit pre-existing social links, since these offer better information about a recruiter’s unobservable qualities and provide leverage over the candidate.<sup>63</sup>

“Attitudes, ideas, reasoning, and physical experiences of individuals weigh more heavily in their ability to resist recruitment than do such factors as their age, profession, and gender.”<sup>64</sup> Without getting too in-depth with the social psychology of potential recruits, recruiters look for individuals who might not already be radicalized and that might display the following:

- A high level of current distress or dissatisfaction (emotional, physical, or

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<sup>62</sup> Hegghammer, “The recruiter’s dilemma,” 3-16.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Stephen M. Ash, “Cult-Induced Psychopathology, Part One: Clinical Picture,” *Cultic Studies Journal* (1985): 31–90; and A. Bloomgarden and M. Langone, “Preventive Education on Cultism for High-School Students: A Comparison of Different Programs’ Effects on Potential Vulnerability to Cults,” *Cultic Studies Journal* (1984): 167–177.

both)

- Cultural disillusionment in a frustrated seeker (i.e., unfulfilled idealism)
- Lack of an intrinsic religious belief system or value system
- Some dysfunctionality in family system (i.e., family and kin community exert “weak gravity”)
- Some dependent personality tendencies (e.g., suggestibility, low tolerance for ambiguity)<sup>65</sup>

There has been little research regarding vulnerability of individuals to be recruited by terrorist organizations; however, it stands to reason that one or two of these psychological vulnerabilities exist in those that are recruited. Besides specific characteristics and skill sets that recruiters seek out in individuals, recruiters also use specific tactics and methods to reach a wide audience for recruitment. Terrorist organizations depend on their “continued ability to recruit, to mobilize, and to animate both actual and would-be fighters, supporters, and sympathizers.”<sup>66</sup>

In order to understand the process in which recruiters utilize to garner the interest in individuals, one must ascertain that there is “no single, uniform recruitment process for a group; rather, there are as many recruitment processes as there are distinct regions and nodes in which the group operates. While there may be overlap and similarity between the recruitment techniques in one location and

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<sup>65</sup> S. Ash, 1985; M. Zerlin. 1982. “The Pied Piper Phenomenon: Family Systems and Vulnerability to Cults,” unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Fielding Institute, Santa Barbara, Calif.

<sup>66</sup> Bruce Hoffman, “Redefining counterterrorism: The terrorist leader as CEO”, *Rand Review*. (2004).

those in another, there will as often be stark differences.”<sup>67</sup> One must also note that since recruiters are seeking out individuals with particular skill sets or characteristics, there is no “one-size-fits-all” mold in which recruiters use.<sup>68</sup> Not only must recruiters adapt and re-structure different recruitment patterns in order to solicit members, recruiters must also tactfully employ compelling communication techniques and strategies that are relatable and persuasive enough to gain the interest of individuals.

### *Recruitment Models*

Gerwehr and Daly developed several models of recruitment for better understanding of how recruiters may use a specific process or pattern to garner the interest of potential recruits. Their model is based upon al-Qaeda past recruiting efforts, but takes into consideration the range of demographic variables such as the environment, core audience, and the geographical location or region. The recruitment method and/or recruiter changes the method/delivery of the message based upon demographic variables. Like the radicalization process in individuals to terrorist organizations, there is no one specific recruitment method that works across the spectrum.

Gerwehr and Daly identify the first recruitment model as being the net model. This type of recruitment can be viewed in terms of casting a wide net to gain attraction to potential recruits. “Some members will respond positively, others negatively; but in general the whole population is viewed as being primed

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<sup>67</sup> Scott Gerwehr and Sara Daly, “Al-Qaida: Terrorist Selection and Recruitment”, *McGraw-Hill Homeland Security Handbook (2006)*: 73-89.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

for recruitment.”<sup>69</sup> The recruiter views the target audience as being like-minded and receptive enough to be recruited without tailoring to specific individuals. This is likely, as Gerwehr and Daly state, due to “geographic and demographic-psychographic similarities and contrasts among members of the targeted audience.”<sup>70</sup> The net model has the potential to work in geographical areas such as Pakistan, where locals tend to share the same belief system and be easily targeted.

The funnel approach to recruitment is much like a pipeline, “the recruits start at one end of the process and are transformed [after some weeding-out of individuals] along the way, into dedicated group members when they emerge at the other end.”<sup>71</sup> The way in which one can understand this approach is to think of it in terms of the rituals and hazing that occurs during sorority or fraternities. These groups utilize these rituals to validate the level of commitment that potential pledges have to joining said group; or as in the case of al-Qaeda, “demonstrating knowledge of radical Islam and the use of violence to achieve its goals.”<sup>72</sup>

The infection approach is usually employed in areas that make it geographically challenging to access the population. This model uses the theory that someone who has already been recruited to the organization/group then be inserted back into the target population to recruit individuals. The infection model uses a direct method approach; thereby, employing a representative to directly

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

target individuals for recruitment. Aptly named, the infection approach is such that once one individual becomes recruited a chain reaction occurs, in which other individuals will join the organization. This model is best employed in environments such as prisons or refugee camps, where individuals can easily be converted and then recruited. The infection approach is also primed for the type of environment in which familiar ties are prevalent.<sup>73</sup> Della Porta, Sageman, and others have shown that “recruits have joined in clusters and that most had friends already in the organization.”<sup>74</sup>

Lastly, Gerwehr and Daly identify the seed crystal model. This approach is utilized in diaspora communities or dangerous populations that are unsupportive of terrorist groups/activities. Gerwehr and Daly illustrate the seed crystal model as “lowering the temperature of a glass until the water inside it cools and then ice crystals form as the seeds of a complete freeze.”<sup>75</sup> In this instance, recruiters manipulate the environment or plant a “seed”, as to influence individuals to join on their own. Once an individual has joined the terrorist group, the infection approach has the potential to follow in recruiting additional individuals.<sup>76</sup>

### *Recruitment Grounds*

As previously discussed with Gerwehr and Daly’s recruitment methods, the likelihood of success that an individual will be recruited to a terrorist group is heavily dependent upon their environment. These environments often harbor

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Hegghammer, “The recruiter’s dilemma,” 3-16.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

specific recruitment grounds, which are places in which people are exposed to factors that are likely to initiate, amplify, or accelerate the recruitment process. These grounds are places of vulnerability, congregation, and recruitment magnets.

The recruitment grounds that create vulnerability are places in which people are more likely to experience a crisis or conflict of identity. An example of a recruitment ground that creates vulnerability is universities or college campuses. These students are experiencing life on their own, finding themselves; some have just moved out of their parents' homes, and they are feeling vulnerable. This is the prime opportunity for recruiters to target young recruits to join their terrorist group. One might suggest that a recruiter may employ the net approach at schools in hopes that one or two individuals' interests may be peaked.

The places of congregation are places that recruiters may seek out because many Muslims happen to come together at that particular spot. The majority of congregation recruitment grounds are mosques. Mosques may not always be a place for recruitment; however, mosques can serve as a place for increased religious ideology, which has the potential for individuals to subscribe to extremist ideologies touted by terrorist groups.

Lastly, recruitment magnets are well-known places at which people can connect with extremist/terrorist networks. These locations can be considered everything, from a local YMCA located in a diaspora population to prisons, which have seen an increase in individuals being converted and recruited to al-Qaeda affiliates. The places that have become recruitment magnets can employ almost

any one of Gewehr and Daly's recruitment methods, as these locations can serve as hotbeds of recruitment activity.

### *Recruitment through the Internet*

While many new members are still being recruited through face-to-face interactions, much recruitment in recent years has taken place online. That is not to suggest that face-to-face interactions don't happen but they are much more dangerous and require thorough detail and planning. The Internet has the ability to provide individual's social interaction through Skype, Facebook, and Twitter, without ever having to leave their home. This creates a space for recruiters to manipulate because their targets may feel at ease when accessing these websites or chatting with an individual associated with a terrorist group; it is accomplished within the confines of their own home. Weimann subscribes to the argument that "modern terrorists do not recruit directly online; they use the Net only to identify, profile, and select potential candidates for recruitment."<sup>77</sup> Some might argue that while Weimann is correct in his analysis that terrorist recruiters utilize the Internet to vet potential candidates, some of the more recent case studies suggest that individuals, particularly those in the United States, have mostly all been recruited through the Internet.

Once recruiters have identified and vetted individuals through the Internet, they will utilize Internet propaganda, social media websites, and forums to demonstrate how those individuals can then contribute and become a part of the

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<sup>77</sup> Gabriel Weimann, "Using the Internet for Terrorist Recruitment and Mobilization," *NATO Science for Peace and Security* (2007): 47-58. Accessed February 24, 2014. <http://ebooks.iospress.nl/publication/24117>

“global jihad movement”.<sup>78</sup> Terrorist organizations also have the ability to “capture information about users who browse their websites. Users who seem most interested in the organization’s cause or well suited to carrying out its work are then contacted.”<sup>79</sup>

Terrorist groups have created their own websites to educate individuals on their extremist ideologies and to gain support for their cause. Meanwhile, individuals belonging to these groups can “harness the interactive capabilities of chat rooms, instant messenger, blogs, video-sharing websites, self-determined online communities, and social networks.”<sup>80</sup> Popular social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are a primary means to attract potential candidates and followers. Because these social media sites can be viewed globally, they are gaining in popularity especially amongst younger recruits. “Jihadist terrorist groups especially target youth [via the Internet] for propaganda, incitement, and recruitment purposes.”<sup>81</sup>

While recruitment efforts may seem like a lot of work on the behalf of the recruiter, the payoff in the end can seem well worth it. The Internet has made recruiting much less labor-intensive and mostly virtual. In attempting to identify additional methods that recruiters use, several shortcomings in the literature and research seemed evident. First, very little information is currently published regarding the vulnerability of recruits. While one can surmise that youth demographics are more vulnerable when it comes to recruiting efforts online,

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Gabriel Weimann, “Terror on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube.” *Brown Journal of World Affairs*. (2010).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

there is little information on what factors may actually make these individuals more susceptible to recruitment.

Second, there is an abundance of literature that suggests the Internet is utilized in direct recruitment efforts. Weimann was one of the few authors to suggest that terrorist groups do not use the Internet for direct recruitment. Along those same lines, little information points to a new phenomenon, self-recruitment. Self-recruitment (much like self-radicalization) is the way in which a person basically recruits themselves into a terrorist group. For example, an individual could stumble across an al-Qaeda affiliated website and see images that they identify with. They begin to research and subscribe to al-Qaeda's ideology; then reach out to an individual whom they either know is affiliated with al-Qaeda or someone unknown through these websites to state that they want to become an active participant.

Lastly, the amount of case studies present on this topic mostly suggests a self-recruitment or Internet recruitment angle; very little information regarding face-to-face interactions is present. One might suggest the cause of this is due to the fact that since 9/11, al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups have had to recruit online because U.S became aware of their domestic presence and intended motives.

There are several theories to examine when determining how individuals residing in the United States are being recruited to terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda. As previously discussed, Gewehr and Daly's different recruitment methods or approaches demonstrate how recruiters may target individuals given

their specific environmental factors. There is also no one course of action that individuals might follow in order to be recruited. The recruitment process varies from each individual and the recruiter tailors his/her communications to the intended recipient based upon their surroundings.

“A group’s membership is also shaped by the tactical choices of recruiters, such as where they look for candidates, how they screen them, and who they are inclined to admit.”<sup>82</sup> Two fundamental approaches have been identified to assist recruiters in obtaining individuals for membership. Sageman’s argument is firmly rooted in the bottom up recruitment approach; individuals are more likely to be recruited to an organization based on “friendship and kinship.”<sup>83</sup> These recruitment efforts occur at a ground level, with individuals joining based on the “infection” approach, or rather through friends or family with existing ties to these organizations.

In more recent years, the bottom-up approach to recruitment efforts has become synonymous with recruitment efforts via the Internet. Social media websites such as Facebook or Twitter may allow family members associated with al-Qaeda to reach back to family members in the U.S. to become involved and join the organization. The reverse could also happen and individuals in the U.S. could subscribe to the Facebook/Twitter of family members associated to al-Qaeda and also feel empowered to join. This type of self-recruitment has become more popular as the Internet continues to expand along with the power of social media websites.

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<sup>82</sup> Hegghammer, “The recruiter’s dilemma,” 3-16.

<sup>83</sup> Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-first Century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008.

Unlike Sageman, Weimann argues for a top-down approach, in that “terrorist organizations go looking for recruits rather than waiting for them to present themselves.”<sup>84</sup> Both Hoffman and Weimann subscribe to the approach al-Qaeda recruits individuals by utilizing the upper tiers of the organization to aid in driving recruitment. However, unlike Weimann, Hoffman believes that the involvement of higher-level individuals aiding in recruitment efforts can be indicative of a carefully constructed succession plan by al-Qaeda.<sup>85</sup> During the May 2011 raid upon Osama bin Laden’s compound, it had been discovered via computer software/documents that al-Qaeda senior leadership plays a significant role in recruitment efforts.<sup>86</sup>

Another theory that can be applied to the recruitment process is Spence’s signaling theory, in which “one party sends a signal”<sup>87</sup> or in this case reaches out to someone either in-person or over the Internet via web forum or e-mail. That party would then “reveal some sort of relevant information to the other party.”<sup>88</sup> This could be a recruiter reaching out to a potential candidate and informing the candidate that he/she belongs to al-Qaeda. The party on the receiving end would then “interpret the signal and adjust... accordingly.”<sup>89</sup> The signaling theory is often used when referring to economics; however, it can also be applied to the recruiting phase of a terrorist group. “Drawing on signaling theory, Weinstein

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<sup>84</sup> Gabriel Weimann, “Using the Internet for Terrorist Recruitment and Mobilization,” *Hypermedia Seduction for Terrorist Recruiting*. (Netherlands: IOS Press, 2007) 47-58.

<sup>85</sup> Bruce Hoffman, and Marc Sageman, “Does Obama Still Call the Shots: Debating the Containment of Al-Qaeda Leadership.” *Foreign Affairs* 87 (2008): 163-166.

<sup>86</sup> Frank Gardner, “Osama bin Laden’s Abbottabad house ‘was al Qaeda hub.’” *BBC*, May 8, 2011. Accessed April 01, 2014. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-13325595>.

<sup>87</sup> Michael Spence, "Job Market Signaling". *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (1973): 355-374.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

argues that recruiters collect signals of commitment in various ways, notably information-gathering, vouching and costly induction.”<sup>90</sup>

This paper stands to suggest that terrorist organizations utilize the Internet as the primary tool to recruit individuals. This paper also examines how individuals are becoming self-recruiters due to the Internet. The previously aforementioned theories and methods will aid in demonstrating how individuals are recruited, as the case studies will suggest individuals utilize the Internet to further their own recruitment efforts.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology used to identify whether individuals are becoming more susceptible to recruitment efforts through the Internet is a case study comparison between popular Imam and al-Qaeda recruiter, Abu Hamza al-Masri, al-Qaeda once-affiliated recruit turned recruiter, Omar Hammami, and self-recruited Faisal Shahzad. These case studies were selected based on the individual’s connection to recruitment efforts and where these individuals fit in the recruitment process. I chose to highlight high-profile cases because those selected had the most amount of information publicly available. Unfortunately with a majority of these case studies, information is not available until the individual referenced in the case has been arrested or subject of a high-profile investigation.

The case study on Abu Hamza al-Masri was selected based upon three factors- his trial has been ongoing and details of his recruitment efforts were easily available; he was a notable Imam at a Mosque, which demonstrates his connection and outreach to individuals in his community; and he utilized face-to-

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<sup>90</sup> Hegghammer, “The recruiter’s dilemma,” 3-16.

face recruitment versus online. I wanted to highlight this case to test my hypothesis against. Hamza's case also draws upon the aforementioned breeding grounds, such as mosques, which are prime areas for targeting specific recruits. Unfortunately, a majority of Hamza's recruiting efforts took place in late 1990's/early 2000's, which does not account for Internet recruiting; yet, it demonstrates the way in which recruiting efforts have shifted since that time period and how difficult it could be nowadays to recruit individuals by employing such efforts.

Next, the case study of Omar Hammami was selected as a prime example of how individuals utilize the Internet to become radicalized and eventually recruited to join al-Qaeda affiliate al-Shabaab. I found Hammami's case to be interesting as it demonstrates how individuals can be targeted through jihadist websites and eventually recruited to join the organization. Once in the organization, I found it interesting that Hammami eventually became an advocate/recruiter for al-Shabbab. Hammami then utilized the Internet to spread jihadist propaganda and target others for recruitment.

Lastly, the case study of Faisal Shahzad was evaluated not only because of Shahzad's background, but Shahzad allegedly had reached out to Pakistani Taliban via the Internet and had been recruited through his own accord, versus the organization reaching out to him. It has been speculated that because Shahzad's attack was conducted sloppily, that the Pakistani Taliban did not properly vet him, and why should they when he willingly wanted to join the group. The group welcomed Shahzad based on his U.S. naturalized citizenship; making it easier for

him to travel from the U.S. to Pakistan. This calls into question the organization's vetting process during recruitment and attracting poor quality of recruits without proper vetting. It has also been stated that Shahzad was also victim to the teachings and sermons of Anwar al-Awlaki, who has also speculated to have recruited Shahzad.

These case studies will help further my hypothesis of whether terrorist groups primarily utilize the Internet to recruit individuals in the U.S. I believe that terrorist groups are moving towards utilizing only the Internet as a method of recruitment because of cost, time, and effectiveness; not to mention, the Internet allows for some degree of anonymity when it comes to vetting potential recruits and not being detected by authorities. Most authorities are already aware of the recruitment grounds and areas in certain communities, which make it difficult for recruiters to attract potential members. The Internet solves that problem.

### **DATA**

#### *Abu Hamza al-Masri*

On Thursday, April 17, 2014, a New York jury convened to begin the trial of Egyptian-born cleric, Abu Hamza al-Masri. Hamza was extradited to the U.S. in 2012, and facing terrorism charges. Hamza was the former imam of the Finsbury Park mosque in North London, which has been often been mentioned as a popular mosque for recruitment and radicalization of individuals. Hamza was a charismatic imam, who preached an "intolerant Wahhabi interpretation of the

Koran which incites Muslims to engage in violent acts.”<sup>91</sup> It has been speculated that Hamza used the “cover of religion to recruit and indoctrinate men, and to export violence and terror around the world.”<sup>92</sup>

Hamza not only recruited individuals through the guise of his mosque, but he also utilized the Internet to publish his speeches. In his speeches, Hamza “told able-bodied Muslims they had a duty to wage war against non-Muslims, to fight and to kill.”<sup>93</sup> Hamza has also been known to pass out pamphlets and other pieces of propaganda. Hamza has been connected to individuals such as 9/11 conspirator, Zacarias Moussaoui and attempted UK shoe-bomber, Richard Reid. In May 2014, Hamza was convicted of conspiring to open a terrorist training camp in Bly, Oregon, in 1999. It has been speculated by officials that the camp was to serve as the training ground for individuals eventually leaving to head to Afghanistan.

#### *Faisal Shahzad*

Faisal Shahzad is a U.S. naturalized citizen of Pakistani decent, who was arrested for the attempted May 2010 Times Square car bombing. Shahzad came from a “wealthy, educated family in northwest Pakistan.”<sup>94</sup> An article in the New York Times reported:

Shahzad’s life seems to have followed a familiar narrative about radicalization in the West: his anger toward his

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<sup>91</sup> Canadian Center for Intelligence and Security Studies, “Militant Jihadism: Radicalization, Conversion, Recruitment,” *ITAC*. Volume 2006-4. Accessed October 31, 2014. <http://www.itac.gc.ca/pblctns/pdf/2006-4-eng.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> Karen McVeigh, “Abu Hamza Used ‘Cover of Religion’ to Recruit Terrorists, Court Hears,” *The Guardian*. April 17, 2014. Accessed April 29, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/17/abu-hamza-cover-religion-terrorism-trial>

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> CNN Wire Staff, “Times Square Suspect had Explosives Training, Documents Say,” *CNN*. May 05, 2010. Accessed April 18, 2014. <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/CRIME/05/04/new.york.car.bomb/index.html?>

adopted country seemed to have grown in lockstep with his personal struggles. He had lost his home to foreclosure last year. At the same time he was showing signs of a profound, religiously infused alienation.<sup>95</sup>

It wasn't until 2006, that Shahzad had become more religiously devout and questioned the Muslim faith in the Western world.<sup>96</sup> "He began to pray five times a day, at mosques..."<sup>97</sup> in the Connecticut area. In July 2009, Shahzad traveled to Pakistan. In Pakistan, Shahzad visited Peshawar, "a gateway to the militant-occupied tribal regions of Pakistan... While in Pakistan, and he said he trained a terrorist training camp in what was believed to be Waziristan [Pakistan/Afghanistan border]."<sup>98</sup> During interviews with law enforcement officials after his arrest, Shahzad admitted to learning bomb-making techniques at these camps in Waziristan, which were run by the Pakistani Taliban.<sup>99</sup> Shahzad informed interrogators that he was inspired by videos posted on-line by Anwar al-Awlaki, to join al-Qaeda.

### *Omar Hammami*

Omar Hammami also known as Abu Mansoor Al-Amriki, an American citizen, grew up in Daphne, Alabama with his Syrian born father and American mother. Over time Hammami grew increasingly religious and began to identify as a Muslim in high school after several trips to Syria with his father. Hammami

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<sup>95</sup> Andrea Elliott, "For Times Sq. Suspect, Long Roots of Discontent," *New York Times*. May 15, 2010. Accessed April 05, 2014.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/16/nyregion/16suspect.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/16/nyregion/16suspect.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&)

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Clifden Kennedy, "Faisal Shahzad charged with five counts, admits training in Pakistan," *CBS News*. May 04, 2010. Accessed March 05, 2014. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/faisal-shahzad-charged-with-five-counts-admits-training-in-pakistan/>

<sup>99</sup> "Taliban's Suicide-Bomb trainer tutored NYK bombing suspect," *Hindustan Times*. May 6, 2010. Accessed March 11, 2014. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/taliban-s-suicide-bomb-trainer-tutored-nyk-bombing-suspect/article1-540060.aspx>

began to struggle between two worlds that of Western culture, which he grew up around and that of Islam, which Hammami began to feel drawn towards. Between high school and starting college, as Hammami began to make the slow transition into a full-fledged Muslim, he began to detach himself from Western culture.

In 2002, Hammami ended up quitting college at the University of Southern Alabama and moved to Toronto, Canada. Hammami liked Toronto due to its growing Muslim population and had become more aware of the US Invasion of Iraq. This had raised his interest in jihad.<sup>100</sup> In March 2005, Hammami married 19-year-old Sadiyo Mohamed Abdille, a Canadian-Somali immigrant whose family had fled the fighting for Canada. Shortly after, Hammami and his wife decided to move to Alexandria, Egypt.<sup>101</sup> This move was instrumental and had a significant impact on Hammami, as it moved him closer to individuals that were fully immersed in Jihad.

It was through an Internet forum, Hammami met American convert, Daniel Maldonado, who was living in Cairo with his family. The two young men secretly made plans to leave for Somalia. In November 2006, Hammami traveled to Somalia and joined al-Shabaab soon after, as Mogadishu descended into war. In October 2007, Hammami appeared publicly identified as "*Abu Mansoor Al-Amriki*" (the American) for the first time, giving an interview for *Al-Jazeera*. Fluent in Arabic, with computer and organization skills, Hammami was noticed by his superiors.<sup>102</sup> In a January 2008 letter, Al-Amriki explained al-Shabaab's

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<sup>100</sup> Andrea Elliott, "The Jihadist Next Door," *New York Times*. January 27, 2010. Accessed March 11, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/31/magazine/31Jihadist-t.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

goal to establish an Islamic caliphate "from East to West after removing the occupier and killing the apostates."<sup>103</sup> Hammami became a major leader in al-Shabaab, serving as a commander, recruiter, and propagandist.<sup>104</sup> According to the New York Times, Hammami was said to have commanded "guerrilla forces in the field, organizing attacks and plotting strategy with al Qaeda operatives". Hammami was said to have directed an October 2008 operation in which Shirwa Ahmed, a Somali-American, blew himself up, the first known American Suicide bomber. In 2010 United States officials stated they knew of no other American citizen who had risen so high as Hammami in al-Shabaab, although it had recruited nearly 20 Americans, many from the Minneapolis area.<sup>105</sup>

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on the case studies presented, terrorist groups are not shifting towards primarily utilizing the Internet to recruit individuals. While the Internet is a factor that can aid in recruitment efforts, charismatic individuals are still depended upon by terrorist groups to identify, vet, and recruit individuals through face-to-face interaction. By doing so, it demonstrates to the individual being recruited the level of commitment on the behalf of the terrorist organization and a sense of being wanted by the recruit. This disproves my hypothesis; however, terrorist still utilize the Internet for recruitment tactics. The cases selected demonstrate that while U.S. based individuals may be more apt to be recruited

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<sup>103</sup> Abu Mansoor al-Amriki, "A Message to the Mujahideen in Particular & the Muslims in General," *The Unjust Media*, January 08, 2008,

<http://theunjustmedia.com/Islamic%20Perspectives/Feb%202008/A%20Message%20to%20the%20Mujahideen%20in%20Particular%20&%20the%20Muslims%20in%20general.htm>

<sup>104</sup> Thomas, Joscelyn, "Son of infamous al Qaeda family killed by Ethiopian forces," *Long War Journal*. December 30, 2011. Accessed March 11, 2014.

[http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/12/son\\_of\\_infamous\\_al\\_q.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/12/son_of_infamous_al_q.php)

<sup>105</sup> Elliott, "The Jihadist Next Door."

through efforts via the Internet, it does not completely discredit that mosques in the U.S. are not areas for recruitment. However, these recruitment grounds are under the watchful eye of authorities, as they are recognized as areas for recruitment.

One cannot compare Gerwehr and Daly's recruitment methods to Hamza's, as it is still unknown what tactics were employed. One might speculate that he may have used a net approach when posting his sermons online to make it widely available to a large audience in the hopes of reaching one or two individuals primed for recruitment. It is difficult to determine how many individuals were recruited to terrorist groups based on Hamza's online videos and postings. The certainty that Hamza utilized the Finsbury Park mosque as a recruitment breeding ground and himself as a recruitment magnet is highly likely in this case. The Finsbury Park Mosque has been notorious for churning out radicalized recruits. I think it is also important to point out that Hamza was an extremely charismatic person and created such a following with individuals that it was easy for him to target potential recruits.

In the case of Faisal Shahzad, while financial problems and religious confusion may be the catalyst that sparked his radicalization process, his recruitment into jihad started with videos posted online from Anwar al-Awlaki. While it was not stated in interviews Shahzad had with interrogators post-arrest, it could be speculated that once Shahzad had viewed Awlaki's videos online, it might have sparked his curiosity to view additional jihadist Internet content. It could also be considered that while Shahzad was in Pakistan, the Pakistani

Taliban learned that he was a naturalized U.S. citizen with access to a Western passport. “Al-Qaida and other international militant groups are known to actively seek out recruits with Western passports to avoid scrutiny when traveling across the world. Shahzad, who had American citizenship, would have been a highly praised recruit.”<sup>106</sup> Shahzad’s case seems to be more frequent with additional case studies in that an individual sees radical postings, videos, or propaganda online and decides to join the terrorist group or organization. The individuals who post the information on websites do so with the intention of again having one or two individuals receive the message. Again, this is in alignment with Gerwehr and Daly’s net approach.

Lastly, with the case of Omar Hammami, he mirrored Shahzad in that he was discontent with his religious beliefs in the Western world and turned to the Internet, which had radicalized him. It was through web forums that he learned of another American (Daniel Moldonado). By Hammami reaching out to Moldonado, he created a connection with someone who had the same belief system and shared the same feelings. This also motivated him to move to Cairo and eventually be recruited to al-Shabaab. In return, Hammami has acted as a recruiter on behalf of al-Shabaab and has utilized the infection approach since he has reach-back to individuals within the United States.

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<sup>106</sup> The Associated Press, “New York bomb suspect Faisal Shahzad was seen as a good recruit for militants,” *The Oregonian*. May 05, 2010. Accessed February 26, 2014. [http://www.oregonlive.com/news/index.ssf/2010/05/new\\_york\\_bomb\\_suspect\\_faisal\\_s.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/news/index.ssf/2010/05/new_york_bomb_suspect_faisal_s.html)

## CONCLUSION

“The susceptibility of Muslim immigrants -- or their offspring -- to extremist, violent forms of Islam has long been noted. The most often cited reason for this is the ability of Islam to give people a clear sense of identity in an unfriendly and confusing environment.”<sup>107</sup> It is often the confusing environment to which some individuals live in which causes them to recruit or join terrorist organizations. These organizations give them a sense of belonging and stability to their extremist ideology. While the Internet may not be the prime recruitment tool for recruiters to utilize and individuals to subscribe to, the Internet still creates an anonymous space for terrorist groups to recruit and display their disdain for Western countries. One might suggest that the days of face-to-face recruitment are over, and while that may be true in cases of individuals being recruited in the United States, elsewhere face-to-face recruitment is still a viable option. Due to closeness proximity of terrorist organizations, recruiters living in European countries may still use face-to-face recruitment.

The U.S. and other governments will continue to fight the ongoing problems associated with recruiters who utilize the Internet to target potential recruits. Due to the constant changes and developments of new web applications, terrorist networks, like al-Qaeda, will continue to utilize the Internet to subconsciously push out their message to users and develop new plans to attack Western interests at a rapid rate.

This research also opens up the broader question as to what the U.S. is doing to safeguard the Internet so more individuals do not become recruited. It also begs

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

the question what programs and policies the U.S. is undertaking to stop recruitment efforts and create counter-recruitment measures/messaging.

The research in this chapter contributes what we currently know about individuals being recruited in the United States; however, while terrorist groups are shifting to recruitment tactics online, it does not discredit the recruitment efforts that take place through face-to-face interaction. In some instances, an individual needs the personal interaction to solidify their membership to the organization. My research in this chapter also demonstrates the multiple levels of recruitment that can take place, and that like radicalization, there is no linear process for recruitment.

**CHAPTER 3-**  
**ALIENATING COMMUNITIES: EFFECTS OF CVE PROGRAMS IN**  
**THE U.S.**

In an effort to win the hearts and minds of individuals residing in the communities that are most susceptible to radicalization/recruitment efforts by terrorist organizations, governments are turning to the creation of counter-radicalization and de-radicalization programs. The goal of these programs is to get “the individual to change his belief system, reject the extremist ideology and embrace a moderate worldview.”<sup>108</sup> A majority of these programs are influenced by a soft-power approach, meaning they seek to leverage relationships with local communities through partnerships rather than by force. These programs have become an integral function within the counterterrorism strategies employed by many countries. They have also become a way to understand the mindset of militant Islamist groups, which can aid in preventing any future attacks.

Since 9/11, it has been argued that some of the “best-designed de-radicalization and counter-radicalization programs [lie] in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Europe.”<sup>109</sup> These countries were forced to address the threat of homegrown terrorism much sooner than the U.S. due to their Muslim populations and the rate at which individuals were becoming radicalized. With the U.S. being one of the last countries to adopt a strategy to mitigate the threat of homegrown terrorism, the U.S. strategy has been modeled after others. The problem lies in whether the U.S. has been effective in combating violent radicalization/recruitment in the homeland, based on the fact that the U.S. did not develop a strategy on its own.

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<sup>108</sup> Angel Rabasa, “Deradicalization Process is Essential Part of Fighting Terrorism,” *RAND*. November 2010. Accessed October 01, 2014. <http://www.rand.org/news/press/2010/11/29.html>

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

A generational gap currently resides within many of the Muslim Diaspora communities in the United States. Due to this gap, some individuals residing within these communities experience the difficulties of being caught between two cultures; some might even feel ostracized because of it. Those individuals, who have come to embrace anti-American sentiment, can be susceptible to radicalization.<sup>110</sup> While the U.S. government has expressed the importance of establishing partnerships within these communities, it can often be perceived that countering violent extremism programs unfairly targets these communities. This chapter explores the idea that combating violent extremism (CVE) programs in the U.S. are contributing to the radicalization of individuals because these programs alienate the communities to which they are deployed in, causing distrust in the government.

Many scholars believe that the current U.S. strategy to combat the radicalization and recruitment of individuals not only lacks a clear definition but the programs are short of perceived expectations. This is mainly because the U.S. is working off of strategies employed by other countries that had years to adjust to similar shortcomings. One of the strategy changes that have been widely argued is to allow communities to police themselves in conjunction with local and state law enforcement. It may be possible for the U.S. government to become more effective in counter-radicalization and de-radicalization programs by allowing locals to engage their own in a bottom-up approach. As the U.S. begins to develop counter-radicalization and de-radicalization programs to combat violent

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<sup>110</sup> Philip Holtmann, "Countering Al-Qaeda's Single Narrative," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7, no. 2 (2013): 141-146.

extremism (CVE), the lessons learned from other countries can prove to be worthwhile as the threat continues to be global.

Unlike the previous two chapters, this chapter discusses a solution to the problem of radicalization and eventual recruitment of individuals to terrorist organizations within the United States. It is imperative for the U.S. to identify a solution to this ongoing problem as homegrown terrorism has seen a spike in recent years. In the literature review, I discuss the perceived wisdom and shortcomings in the current U.S. combating violent extremism (CVE) strategy. The following section will contain a study comparison between grassroots programs in the U.S. and the United Kingdom's PREVENT strategy, to which a large portion of the U.S. CVE strategy was modeled after. In the last section, I seek to combine the perceived wisdom of scholarly research and the data taken from the study comparison to determine if the U.S counter-radicalization strategy is contributing to the radicalization of individuals, and what steps, if any, going forward the U.S. government can employ to be successful in ensuring the success of counter-radicalization/de-radicalization programs.

This chapter is composed of five main sections. First, it begins with a review of the literature on counter-radicalization and de-radicalization programs. The literature review also examines the current U.S. CVE strategy. Second, it describes the approach, a case study comparison to determine if my hypothesis- U.S. CVE programs are contributing to the radicalization of individuals is correct. Third, I provide a detailed explanation for the case studies selected- two U.S. counter-radicalization programs, one sponsored by the government and the other

privately-owned and operated by the community, and it compares the U.S. programs against the UK's PREVENT strategy, much of which the U.S. CVE strategy was modeled after, and examine these cases through the methodology set forth in the previous section. Fourth, I discuss the results and address similarities and differences between these cases, especially as they relate to my hypothesis. Finally, the chapter concludes with my thoughts on the U.S. CVE strategy and current programs, as well as the need for additional funding and information.

### **CURRENT U.S. CVE STRATEGY**

In this chapter, the literature review will first define terms that are important for the reader to be cognizant of, as a majority of these terms have multiple definitions and meanings as discussed in scholarly literature. Next, it will discuss the goals of the programs that were set out to negate the affects of radicalization in U.S. communities.

As you continue to read through this section, it is hard to ignore the undertone of disappointment that most scholars feel for the current U.S. CVE strategy. This is mostly because the strategy had long been anticipated and fell short of expectations.

#### *What is Combating Violent Extremism?*

Like the term radicalization, combating violent extremism or CVE, has a broad range of definitions in the literature. The ambiguity of the term CVE creates problems for scholars and policymakers alike. The “definitions range from stopping people from embracing extreme beliefs that might lead to terrorism to

reducing active support for terrorist groups.”<sup>111</sup> As Chowdhury Fink explains, the lack of clarity in a CVE definition creates difficulty in determining funding for U.S. programs, evaluating the progress of programs, and makes the government look fragmented in its messaging. As it applies to the U.S. CVE strategy, the inability to clearly define the term CVE has a direct impact on the programs dedicated to resolving this problem. Simply stated, as the definition of CVE remains unclear, so too do the objectives of the program. With the assistance of Bjelopera’s definition, I define CVE as the strategies employed by the U.S. to combat individuals residing in the United States that hold “radical or extremist beliefs that may eventually compel them to commit [acts] of terrorism.”<sup>112</sup>

#### *De-Radicalization and Counter-Radicalization*

Like defining CVE, there is lack of conceptual clarity as it pertains to the terms de-radicalization and counter-radicalization. These terms are important to define as they relate to the types of programs employed by governments to combat violent extremism. Later in this section, I will discuss the importance of these programs, as their purpose gives meaning as to why the government may be employing them. Bjorgo and Horgan define de-radicalization as “any effort aimed at preventing radicalization from taking place.”<sup>113</sup> De-radicalization programs are not meant to be preventative in nature; instead, these programs are designed to

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<sup>111</sup> Will McCants and Clint Watts, “U.S. Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism: An Assessment,” Foreign Policy Research Institute. <http://www.fpri.org>. December 2012.

<sup>112</sup> Jerome P. Bjelopera, “Countering violent Extremism in the United States.” *Congressional Research Service*. February 19, 2014.

<sup>113</sup> T. Bjorgo and J. Horgan, ‘Conclusions’, in Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan (Eds.), *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 3.

negate the brainwashing affects/tactics utilized by terrorist groups. These programs help deprogram individuals who have already been radicalized.<sup>114</sup>

Unlike de-radicalization programs, counter-radicalization programs carry more of an anticipatory sentiment. As defined by the United Nations Working Group on Radicalization and Extremism, counter-radicalization refers to “a package of social, political, legal, educational and economic programs specifically designed to deter disaffected individuals from crossing the line and becoming terrorists.”<sup>115</sup> The main focus of counter-radicalization efforts is to actively seek individuals who have not yet been radicalized and deter them from becoming radicalized. Counter-radicalization programs focus on the whole of community approach, in which strengthening a community may deter terrorists from emerging.

#### *Goals of CVE Programs*

The goal of CVE programs is not singular in nature. The initiatives included in these programs range from “the de-radicalization of incarcerated al-Qaeda militants to the creation of Muslim-oriented magazines and TV programs.”<sup>116</sup> It is important to note that while one de-radicalization program might work in Los Angeles, the same program might not yield the same results if employed in Minneapolis. There is no one single method that will work in all

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<sup>114</sup> “Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review,” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*. March 2013. Accessed September 15, 2014. <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf>

<sup>115</sup> Rachel Briggs and Alex Strugnell. “The Role of Civil Society in Counter-Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation: A Working Paper of the European Policy Planners’ Network on Countering Radicalisation and Polarisation.” *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*. Policy Planners Network, October 2010. Accessed September 05, 2014. [http://www.strategicdialogue.org/PPN%20Paper%20%20Community%20Engagement\\_FORWEBSITE.pdf](http://www.strategicdialogue.org/PPN%20Paper%20%20Community%20Engagement_FORWEBSITE.pdf)

<sup>116</sup> Lorenzo Vidino, “Countering Radicalization in America; Lessons from Europe.” *United States Institute of Peace Special Report* 262. (November 2010): 2-10.

cases which is why a broad approach must be taken. Bjorgo and Horgan identify the following purposes of de-radicalization programs:

- Reducing the number of active terrorists;
- Reducing violence and victimization;
- Re-orienting ideological views and attitudes of participants;
- Re-socialize ex-members back to normal life;
- Acquiring intelligence, evidence and witnesses in court cases.<sup>117</sup>

Unlike Bjorgo and Horgan, Rabasa believes that de-radicalization programs only have two goals: to obtain intelligence on extremist organizations and to discredit the ideology.<sup>118</sup> Rabasa's approach takes into consideration the goals of de-radicalization programs as viewed by the government.

Counter-radicalization programs rely heavily on strengthening the communities from which terrorists might emerge.<sup>119</sup> This is important because an individual is more likely to respect the opinion/advice of peers within their community rather than individuals he/she is less likely to know or identify with. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy developed the following steps that advocates of counter-radicalization programs should take to ensuring success:

- Empower mainstream Muslim voices;
- Address local grievances, not global ones;

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<sup>117</sup> John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, "Evaluating the Effectiveness of De-Radicalization Programs; Towards a Scientific Approach to Terrorism Risk Reduction," in Sarah Canna (Ed.), (2011) op. cit., pp. 1-2.

<sup>118</sup> Angel Rabasa, "Deradicalization Process is Essential Part of Fighting Terrorism," *RAND*. November 2010. Accessed October 01, 2014. <http://www.rand.org/news/press/2010/11/29.html>

<sup>119</sup> "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*. March 2013. Accessed September 15, 2014. <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf>

- Employ nuanced, non-combative rhetoric;
- Challenge extremists in cyberspace;
- Broaden Muslim outreach.<sup>120</sup>

*Negative Undertones of the U.S. CVE Strategy*

In August 2011, the White House published “Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States.” The U.S. CVE strategy was primarily created to reduce the number of individuals vulnerable to radicalization, or as McCants and Watts identify as “sympathizers”.<sup>121</sup> The government’s CVE efforts, as laid out in the document, centers on the engagement with the Muslim American population and community involvement, which has been described by many as the cornerstone in the U.S. CVE strategy.

The U.S. CVE strategy which hinges on the relationship that the government creates with local communities has come under scrutiny, as it has been perceived as unfairly targeting the Muslim American population. Since Western Muslim communities are already deeply fragmented among religious and ethnic ties, trying to gain allies to partner in CVE programs has proven to be difficult for the U.S. government.

A study of policing in Arab American communities by the National Institute of Justice, found four key obstacles that hinder outreach between U.S. Arabs and law enforcement. There is a level of “distrust between Arab communities and law enforcement, lack of cultural awareness among law

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<sup>120</sup> Washington Institute for Near East Policy Presidential Task Force on Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism, *Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterterrorism* (Washington, DC, Washington Institute, March 2009), pp. 13-18.

<sup>121</sup> Will McCants and Clint Watts, “U.S. Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism: An Assessment,” Foreign Policy Research Institute. <http://www.fpri.org>. December 2012.

enforcement officers, language barriers, and concerns about immigration status and fears of deportation.”<sup>122</sup> These obstacles not only widen the gap between law enforcement and local community partnerships, but they perpetuate the wide-held belief in these Muslim-American communities that law enforcement personnel are unfairly targeting individuals.

Vidino states that Muslim communities have been targets of negative portrayals in the media since 9/11. Individuals residing within these communities “have reported feeling stigmatized by counter-radicalization programs and being treated as ‘suspect communities,’ as security threats rather than full-fledged citizens. Many have argued that counter-radicalization programs imply that Muslims are inherently prone to terrorism and represent a special problem.”<sup>123</sup>

Sageman cautions “engagement can be a sign of government focus on Muslim communities when instead it should be stressing that Muslims are Americans just like everyone else.”<sup>124</sup> The problem with the U.S. government focusing so heavily on particular communities is that it alienates them, causing potential law-abiding citizens to embrace the terrorist agenda if pushed too far. Sageman suggests that the government should be sending out messages that encompass CVE engagement efforts with all communities, not just those with Muslim populations.

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<sup>122</sup> Jerome P. Bjelopera, “Countering violent Extremism in the United States.” *Congressional Research Service*. February 19, 2014.

<sup>123</sup> Lorenzo Vidino, “Countering Radicalization in America; Lessons from Europe.” *United States Institute of Peace Special Report* 262. (November 2010): 2-10.

<sup>124</sup> Jerome P. Bjelopera, “Countering violent Extremism in the United States.” *Congressional Research Service*. February 19, 2014.

McCants and Watts explore two major problems with the CVE strategy: (1) since anyone can become a sympathizer to a terrorist organization, the CVE strategy has inadvertently categorized those who may not be sympathizers with those who are; therefore, the government runs the risk of alienating individuals residing within these communities, and (2) the CVE strategy does not seek a means to stop “law-abiding supporters of terrorist organizations.”<sup>125</sup>

The CVE strategy should be to dissuade these supporters from becoming radicalized, yet McCants and Watts believe the strategy does far from dissuade. Instead, they view the CVE strategy as a means for law enforcement agencies to gather information and intelligence from these individuals to only be utilized in building cases against them or individuals in the community. As McCants and Watts allude to, by alienating individuals in predominantly Muslim communities or singling out individuals to be used for law enforcement purposes, not only creates tension in the relationship between the community and the government but it also breeds mistrust, which can be a root cause of the radicalization of individuals.

Like other assessments, the International Center for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ICSR) agrees that many have anticipated the U.S. CVE strategy document. The document takes a more “holistic approach”<sup>126</sup> to combating violent extremism and creating a counter-radicalization strategy; it suggests that the entirety of the government should be

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> “ICSR Insight: ‘A Step in the Right Direction’ – Reviewing the U.S. Government’s Counter-Radicalization Strategy,” The International Center for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence. <http://icsr.info/2011/08/icsr-insight-a-step-in-the-right-direction-reviewing-the-u-s-governments-counter-radicalization-strategy-2/> Accessed September 27, 2014.

tackling the problem. ICSR points out that while the strategy is intended to counter radicalization efforts, it names al-Qaeda as being one of its top priorities. This is significant, as the Obama administration had not previously mentioned the terrorist group in documentation out of fear that by doing so could offend Muslim Americans. However, the CVE strategy is evidently clear about the distinction between al-Qaeda and Muslim American communities, which terrorist organizations seek to radicalize and recruit. ICSR views the U.S. CVE strategy as developing Muslim communities to become partners with the government, and not securitize this relationship.<sup>127</sup>

While the U.S. CVE strategy is headed in the right direction to start, ICSR has the same concerns others do- the CVE strategy fails to provide the details necessary to implement a plan. The little general knowledge on counter-radicalization that is possessed by individuals is what ICSR accounts for the lack of detail in the CVE. Because the CVE strategy document does not present detailed action as to how the government plans to leverage relationships with local communities to prevent radicalization and create counter-radicalization programs, ICSR deems the U.S. CVE strategy document to be nothing more than framework at this point in time.<sup>128</sup>

#### *Challenges and Lessons Learned*

Husain states that while the U.S. has taken over 10 years to produce a strategic document aimed at preventing and combating violent extremism, the document falls short of expectations. While the U.S. government created a CVE

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<sup>127</sup> <sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

strategy aimed at empowering American communities to assist in preventing violent extremism, the document does not state a clear, actionable plan. What was considered to be a robust, confident, and credible plan is actually repeating the obvious about federal responsibilities. Husain believes the following points need to be addressed in creating an effective U.S. counter-radicalization strategy:

- Finances- the document does not address funding that should be allotted to local communities to counter al-Qaeda's narrative.
- Hubs of Radicalization- areas where individuals are being radicalized need to be targeted, including the Internet.
- Extremist Ideology- the U.S. needs to identify the problem in order to create a solution. The theo-political ideas to which al-Qaeda defines itself need to be studied and fully understood.
- Community Rapport- the U.S. needs to win back American Muslim trust after being tarnished in past dealings.<sup>129</sup>

While the U.S. government favors a top-down approach to CVE efforts, Sageman suggests that the most effective method of outreach is when Muslim communities initiate it. However, Briggs and Strugnell discuss the following practices the government should be mindful of when engaging civil society:

- Quality of Inter-personal Relationships- trust is vital as it facilitates better communication and sharing of ideas/resources, which in a new policy area such as this can foster relationships and promote lessons learned;

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<sup>129</sup> Ed Husain, "Low Bar Set in U.S. Counterradicalization Strategy," Council on Foreign Relations. August 4, 2011.

- Lack of Information Sharing- information at the federal level needs to be conveyed at the state/local level. Those who are most likely to affect change need to know information in its entirety, as limiting information could hinder their effectiveness.
- Sensitivities Regarding Community Partnerships- marginalized communities will have poor relationships with governments and authorities. When communities do engage, they manage to keep a safe distance from authorities, guard their independence, and might be supportive of not all but some policies. The government needs to remember to tread lightly when partnering with these communities.
- Governments Need An Approach to Counter-Radicalization Purposes- Because these initiatives are often initialized through a security lens, it enforces the uneven power dynamic between government and citizens, which can leave communities feeling more marginalized and fragile rather than empowered and included.<sup>130</sup>

#### *Addressing the Gaps*

As Horgan and Braddock have discussed, an inherent issue with de-radicalization and counter-radicalization programs or the U.S. CVE strategy in general, is that there is an inability to evaluate their success.<sup>131</sup> Currently, very little reliable data exists to detail how many individuals have been successfully

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<sup>130</sup> Rachel Briggs and Alex Strugnell. "The Role of Civil Society in Counter-Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation: A Working Paper of the European Policy Planners' Network on Countering Radicalisation and Polarisation." *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*. Policy Planners Network, October 2010. Accessed September 05, 2014. [http://www.strategicdialogue.org/PPN%20Paper%20%20Community%20Engagement\\_FORWEBSITE.pdf](http://www.strategicdialogue.org/PPN%20Paper%20%20Community%20Engagement_FORWEBSITE.pdf)

<sup>131</sup> Horgan, J., & Braddock, K. (2010). Rehabilitating the Terrorist? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22(2), 267-291.

“saved”. Even if a successful strategy could be developed in counter-radicalizing or de-radicalizing individuals, it does not guarantee that they will not become re-radicalized. Some programs, like those employed in Saudi Arabia, have seen a number of individuals that have gone through de-radicalization and counter-radicalization programs, only to end up back where they started-as a member of a jihadist organization.<sup>132</sup>

Another shortcoming Chowdhury Fink describes is the amount of contact required to de-radicalize an individual. The dialog of de-radicalizing an individual does not begin or result from direct government initiatives, but rather through identification of family, friends, or community leaders.<sup>133</sup> While the current U.S. CVE strategy employs local communities to engage individuals and identify those that need to be de-radicalized or counter-radicalized, these directives come mostly from law enforcement agencies in a top-down approach.

Bjelopera discusses several gaps within the U.S. CVE strategy. First, a publicly available list of grant programs specifically for CVE activities does not exist. By creating a publicly available list, local communities are in a better position to assist the government in its CVE efforts. Secondly, Bjelopera states that the effort lacks a lead agency to maintain all CVE efforts. Without a lead agency it may be difficult to monitor the success/effectiveness of the programs and essentially the funding dedicated to them. While the Department of Homeland Security has an Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties that address

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<sup>132</sup> Philip Holtmann, “Countering Al-Qaeda’s Single Narrative,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7, no. 2 (2013): 141-146.

<sup>133</sup> Naureen Chowdhury Fink and E. B. Hearne, *Beyond Terrorism: Deradicalization and Disengagement from Violent Extremism*. (2008).

engagement activities, it is not the center for CVE efforts. Other agencies such as FBI and Department of Justice have their own engagement activities, which can conflict with DHS' efforts.

Based on the shortcomings and gaps as laid out in the literature review, it is evident that little research currently exists as to whether the U.S. is effective in combating violent radicalization/recruitment in the homeland; not enough empirical data currently exists to determine the effectiveness of these programs. As previously stated in my introduction, my hypothesis is that the U.S. counter-radicalization strategy is contributing to the radicalization of individuals. This is primarily based on the fact that the CVE programs deployed in these communities alienate individuals, perpetuating the anti-American sentiment, which ultimately forces them to embrace the terrorist agenda.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology used in this chapter to identify whether or not the U.S. counter-radicalization strategy is contributing to radicalization in individuals is through a case study comparison between the UK's "Channel Project", the U.S. Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) program ran by the Department of Homeland Security, and a U.S. local community led effort to dispel the negative connotations associated with being Muslim American, entitled "My Jihad," which is a campaign led by the Chicago office of the Council on Arab-Islamic Relations.

I had selected the UK's Channel Project, as it has garnered much attention of the public in recent years and has been scrutinized as alienating communities to

which it has been deployed in. I thought it would be worthwhile to compare U.S. CVE programs with UK's Channel Project, as the U.S. CVE strategy had been modeled after UK's PREVENT strategy. Next, I had selected the CRCL program, as currently it is the only government-led CVE program, which for obvious reasons denotes the U.S. limited effort in this area. As the only government-led CVE program, it is important to determine what impact it is having on the communities to which it services. Lastly, I chose to examine a smaller U.S. local community led effort, with no government affiliation entitled MyJihad. I wanted to compare the effectiveness of government-led efforts versus local community efforts. The approach I wanted to take in comparing these programs was to look at the top-down approach, in relation to the UK "Channel Project" and U.S. CRCL program, in which the government has more control over program initiatives and the bottom-up approach in which community locals are more likely engaged as they are driving the initiatives.

## **DATA**

### *UK PREVENT Strategy*

The United Kingdom's Prevent model is one part of the UK's CONTEST counterterrorism strategy that was released in June 2011, containing four main elements: Pursue, Prevent, Protect, Prepare. Prevent was launched in the wake of the 2005 London transport bombings as a means to "detect and disrupt terrorist plots before they occur by reducing radicalization and improving intelligence in

order to identify plots already in motion.”<sup>134</sup> The U.S. has modeled portions of its CVE strategy after the UK’s Prevent.<sup>135</sup>

CONTEST sought to deal with the “social and racial inequalities that are believed to fuel radicalization and attempts to explain government policy more clearly to Muslim communities.”<sup>136</sup> This plan was built on the idea that the UK would assist Muslim groups in combating radicalization.

Prevent has been the most controversial element of CONTEST, as research suggests Prevent has been accused of “securitizing relations between Muslims and the government, meaning that the government appears to interact with Muslims primarily through security organs to deal with security issues.”<sup>137</sup> Since 2011, the UK has re-structured the Prevent model of CONTEST to make the necessary changes from lessons learned.

#### *The Channel Project*

The UK developed the “Channel Project,” which was employed by the Home Office in October 2012, as an objective of CONTEST and the revised Prevent strategy. The Channel Project has gained notoriety for its implementation of social services to “identify vulnerable individuals through a program of awareness and identification.”<sup>138</sup>

In other words, the Channel Project, allows individuals to nominate people within their community whom they feel may be susceptible to radicalization. The

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<sup>134</sup> Brian Fishman and Andrew Lebovich, “Countering Domestic Radicalization: Lessons for Intelligence Collection and Community Outreach,” New America Foundation. June 2011.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> William Sheridan Combes, “Assessing Two Countering Violent Extremism Programs: Saudi Arabia’s PRAC and the United Kingdom’s Prevent Strategy,” Small Wars Journal. Jul 9 2013.

Channel Project encourages local communities to identify individuals who are at risk of radicalization, and then stages interventions involving key members and family/friends in the community. This grassroots approach to countering violent extremism leverages previous frameworks “for addressing social concerns,”<sup>139</sup> yet the success hinges on its referral program.

The Channel project utilizes a multi-agency approach with existing collaboration between local authorities, the police, and local communities to identify individuals at risk of succumbing to terrorism based upon referrals. The UK government assesses individual referrals based on indicators such as “an expressed support for violence and terrorism; possession of violent extremist literature; attempts to access or contribute to violent extremist websites; possession of material regarding weapons and/or explosives.”<sup>140</sup> Once identified, the government can assess the risk that individual poses and a plan of action to mitigate the risk.

The Channel Process has three primary objects: to identify at-risk individuals, to assess the nature of the risk, and to develop a support system for the individuals concerned. The target audience for the Channel project is individuals who are vulnerable to recruitment to al-Qaeda affiliated, influenced, and inspired groups.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Rachel Briggs and Alex Strugnell. “The Role of Civil Society in Counter-Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation: A Working Paper of the European Policy Planners’ Network on Countering Radicalisation and Polarisation.” *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*. Policy Planners Network, October 2010. Accessed September 05, 2014. [http://www.strategicdialogue.org/PPN%20Paper%20%20Community%20Engagement\\_FORWEBSITE.pdf](http://www.strategicdialogue.org/PPN%20Paper%20%20Community%20Engagement_FORWEBSITE.pdf)

The Channel Project has a clearly defined process that involves the following measures to assist an individual that has been identified as being at-risk for radicalization:

1. Identification;
2. Screen Referrals- This is not only to maintain a proper record of the process but of the individual and to assess whether there is a specific vulnerability that is the cause for the radicalization;
3. Preliminary Assessment- Determine suitability meaning if additional support mechanisms are needed; an assessment on vulnerability and risk is also conducted, as well as a panel review at six and twelve months;
4. Multi-Agency Panel- review of the aforementioned; Develop support plan; Review progress;
5. Delivery of Support Package- a host of contacts that will be present to guide the individual until risk has been mitigated.<sup>142</sup>

CRCL, Department of Homeland Security

The objective of the Department of Homeland Security's CRCL program is to "conduct public outreach and engagement with Arab, Muslim, Sikh, South Asian, Somali, and Middle Eastern communities as part of wider efforts to protect America."<sup>143</sup> The target audiences of this program, as defined previously, are ethnic and religious minority communities. The CRCL program fulfills a

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<sup>142</sup> *Channel: Protecting Vulnerable People From Being Drawn Into Terrorism*. Government of the United Kingdom. October 2012.

<sup>143</sup> Rachel Briggs and Alex Strugnell. "The Role of Civil Society in Counter-Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation: A Working Paper of the European Policy Planners' Network on Countering Radicalisation and Polarisation." *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*. Policy Planners Network, October 2010. Accessed September 05, 2014. [http://www.strategicdialogue.org/PPN%20Paper%20%20Community%20Engagement\\_FORWEBSITE.pdf](http://www.strategicdialogue.org/PPN%20Paper%20%20Community%20Engagement_FORWEBSITE.pdf)

multitude of objectives such as conducting community roundtables, managing an ‘Incident Community Coordination Team’ that allows the government to engage with key community leaders in the aftermath of any potential incidents/threats, and developed training programs to assist local law enforcement on the basic aspects of these cultures.

One of the more significant aspects of CRCL’s engagement effort is the “promotion of the civil service at job fairs, conferences, and in media outlets serving ethnic and religious communities. As a result, community leaders have begun encouraging young people in their communities to seek employment with the Federal government.”<sup>144</sup> CRCL helps aid in highlighting to these communities the benefit of partnership and the government’s willingness to work with these communities.

#### *“My Jihad”*

Unlike the government-run programs, “My Jihad” is a public education campaign ran by the Chicago office of the Council on Arab-Islamic Relations. The campaign’s aim is to utilize the local transportation system and social media to dispel the negative connotations associated with the word “jihad”. “My Jihad” founder, Ahmed Rehab stated that the organization is about “pushing for an intelligent and informed understanding of Islam and its concepts and practices in the media, the educational circles, and the public,” Rehab continued. “Most of all,

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

this campaign is about giving voice to our views, our practices, and simply put, our reality, a reality that is too big to be left out of the conversation.”<sup>145</sup>

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on the comparison case study, it is evident that little research currently exists as to whether the U.S. is effective in combating violent radicalization/recruitment in the homeland. While comparing Channel, CRCL, and MyJihad, it was very apparent that the U.S. lacks counter-radicalization and de-radicalization programs. When first identifying a U.S. counter-radicalization program to compare to the UK’s Channel Project, one did not exist. I had to then be creative and think outside the box in terms of organizations that might assist in this effort. While I understand that the U.S. CVE strategy is still in its infancy, one would surmise that since the plan was first created in 2011, more programs might exist to complement the growing trend of individuals within the U.S. radicalizing.

The fact that there are very few CVE programs being deployed in communities within the United States neither disproves nor proves my hypothesis; the U.S. counter-radicalization strategy is contributing to the radicalization of individuals. Currently little to no empirical evidence exists in measuring the effectiveness of these programs. However, based upon the discriminating factors that the government inadvertently places on these communities, one can infer that individuals could begin to embrace an anti-American sentiment but perhaps not to the point of radicalization.

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<sup>145</sup> ‘My Jihad Bus Ads Debuts in Chicago,’ *Huffington Post*. December 14, 2012. Accessed September 14, 2014. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/14/my-jihad-bus-ads-debut-in\\_n\\_2303222.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/14/my-jihad-bus-ads-debut-in_n_2303222.html)

The U.S. CRCL program does little to address the counter-radicalization and de-radicalization objectives. It seems that the CRCL program mimics that of the U.S. CVE strategy, as it tries to empower locals to prevent violent extremism through government engagement. However, the CRCL program primarily acts as a tool to promote cooperation through various activities. The issue that I foresee with this type of engagement is that it could be viewed as being forced upon these communities or objectives are being forced upon key leaders within the communities. While communities have the opportunity to discuss issues at roundtable discussions, it seems as though little may be done. Again, it does not address the de-radicalization or counter-radicalization programs needed to further a CVE strategy.

In the same token, CRCL brings together community advisors, who are familiar with their culture and who can guide their members towards great empowerment. If you view CRCL from a bottom-up approach, one could suggest that the program could be beneficial so long as the government was taking measures to effectively mitigate any problems.

While “MyJihad” could provide to be a useful tool in community engagement as it relates to counter-radicalization programs, it currently exists to serve as an outlet to promote awareness, which can also assist in forming partnerships that benefit the CVE strategy.

Lastly, it is also very apparent based on the comparison study that the UK’s Channel Project is tailored to encourage local communities to make this process their own. While the program relies heavily on the referral system, which

allows communities to engage their own, it acts more on the honor system, and not every person will be reported.

## **CONCLUSION**

One problem with the current U.S. CVE strategy as it stands is that it focuses on individuals being radicalized in the United States by al-Qaeda; however, nowadays documentation needs to focus on other terrorist networks and organizations like the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS), who has been recently mentioned in the media as radicalizing several individuals within the United States to join ISIS and fight in Syria.

While the U.S. continues to see an increase in the number of individuals that become radicalized and eventually recruited to terrorist organizations, more funding and a better CVE strategy need to be developed. Is the current U.S. CVE strategy effective in combating the recruitment/radicalization of individuals? My answer would be no. Like most of the perceived wisdom in the literature review, I share the same sentiments as scholars in that the current CVE strategy still needs a major overhaul and lays out explicit directions/initiatives to deter individuals in the U.S. from becoming radicalized.

Do I still think that the U.S. counter-radicalization strategy contributes to the radicalization in individuals? I say yes, and that is because the U.S. still has to develop the proper programs and gather a baseline of measurements to determine if these programs can even be effective in the U.S. Not to mention, the U.S. is still combating the societal gap that 9/11 left on the Muslim American

population/communities, which I don't think the government or law enforcement agencies will ever be able to bridge.

## CONCLUSION

While the U.S. continues to be at the forefront of combating the global threat of terrorism abroad, significant strides need to be made at home. In recent years, the U.S. has seen a steady rise in the number of homegrown terrorists and individuals who are leaving the U.S. to aid terrorist groups in their mission. In looking at a majority of these cases, the Internet has been a contributing factor to the individual's commitment to jihad. The Internet provides individuals with an abundance of information to become radicalized, put them in contact with sympathizers or members of a terrorist group, and provided these individuals the ammunition and knowledge needed to conduct an attack. It has become important for the U.S. to focus on the radicalization process that occurs within individuals, before they reach the point of violent extremism and engage in terrorist activity. In addition, it is also important that the U.S. identify potential recruitment grounds, or areas that recruiters utilize to target individuals. Most terrorist groups look for ways to circumvent the system, and if the U.S. is to be successful in stopping homegrown terrorists or lone wolf attacks, we need to first examine the way in which they are reaching their breaking point; look for signs. Most importantly, the U.S. needs to create a CVE strategy and programs that do not create the feeling of alienation amongst Muslim American communities. The United States needs to devote more resources and attention to these areas, as to be more proactive in preventing and eliminating the homegrown terrorist threat.

The first chapter was an analysis of the self-radicalization process of individuals through Internet use. This included an assessment of the literature on

the motivations and root causes of radicalization to determine the main theories and how they apply to the three U.S.-based case studies- Major Nidal Hasan, the Tsarnaev Brothers, and Zale Thompson. While the case study findings validated my hypothesis to be correct under certain circumstances- U.S.-based individuals can self-radicalize through Internet use; it also presented the different points of access via the Internet to radicalize such as e-mail contact with individuals abroad, information gathering/sharing, web forums use, and reinforcing (in most cases) the Islamic extremist ideology. The analysis also indicated that less face-to-face interaction can cause certain individuals to radicalize. The research suggests that terrorist networks will utilize the Internet to recruit individuals to commit acts of jihad against Western interests by flooding the Internet with Islam extremist rhetoric. The findings of this chapter provide insight into how the U.S. must now shift priorities to address the potential increase of individuals being self-radicalized.

As debates continue regarding whether individuals have the ability to become self-radicalized without the influence of outsiders through the use of the Internet, the focal argument should be that individuals are radicalizing through Internet use regardless of whether or not they are acting alone. With the development of social media applications, more individuals have become active Internet users. In my case study and discussion sections, I draw a distinction between those who are directed by the leadership of an organization and those who act on their own. This distinction is important because it helps distinguish between individuals who are acting alone and those who are carrying out the

request of an organization; thereby further assessing if individuals can actual self-radicalize.

The second chapter examined the role of the Internet in recruiting individuals. While my research findings did not support my hypothesis in that terrorist organizations primarily utilize the Internet for recruitment, it did demonstrate that recruiters still prefer to meet with an individual via face to face to help solidify recruitment. While the Internet may play more of a role in today's recruitment tactics, recruitment done by face-to-face interaction is still common. The cases selected demonstrate that while mosques in the United Kingdom can recruit individuals easily, the case is made that individuals in the United States are recruited to join terrorist groups more so through the Internet.

It is often the confusing environment which some individuals live in which causes them to recruit or join terrorist organizations. These organizations give them a sense of belonging and stability to their extremist ideology. While the Internet may not be the prime recruitment tool for recruiters to utilize and individuals to subscribe to, the Internet still creates an anonymous space for terrorist groups to recruit and display their disdain for Western countries. One might suggest that the days of face-to-face recruitment are over, and while that may be true in cases of individuals being recruited in the United States, elsewhere face-to-face recruitment is still a viable option.

The final chapter assesses whether or not U.S.-led CVE programs contribute to the radicalization of individuals residing within Muslim American communities. Three programs were selected-the UK Prevent Strategy, CRCL, and

MyJihad. These programs had different structures with varying types of government involvement. I decided to utilize the UK Prevent Strategy in my case study comparison was because the U.S. had first modeled its CVE strategy after the UK Prevent strategy. The analysis results provided little to no evidence to suggest or disprove that U.S. CVE programs are contributing to the radicalization of individuals in Muslim American communities. However, I could directly infer based on the information provided in the case studies that Muslim American communities are discriminated against based on current CVE strategy. This might cause individuals to radicalize, but again no evidence suggests that it does.

The three chapters all provide evidence that terrorist groups are utilizing the Internet to reach individuals in the U.S., whether it is for recruitment or radicalization purposes. The first chapter demonstrates that U.S.-based individuals do not need to be contacted by a terrorist organization or be affiliated with one to become radicalized, and the Internet has a predominant role in the radicalization process. The chapter on Internet recruitment provides information on how terrorist groups connect to individuals utilizing the Internet for recruitment purposes. Finally, the chapter on U.S. CVE strategy and programs provides evidence that new effective programs need to be utilized to combat violent extremism and the current ones in place create distrust between Muslim American communities and the government. The findings from each chapter provide a better understanding of how the Internet is used to radicalize and recruit individuals, the motivations behind these individuals leaving, and to develop better strategies to combat homegrown terrorists.

The research provided in each chapter had limitations based on the availability of information as it pertains to each topic. This applied to all three chapters. For the first chapter, there is currently limited information in the field regarding self-radicalization; very few cases suggest that individuals self-radicalize. For the first and second chapters, the case studies presented information as identified after the significant event occurred and/or individual had been arrested and was interviewed by authorities. These limitations were unavoidable. The third chapter faced some information restrictions due to lack of funding, research, and programs that have been developed in the U.S. surrounding the CVE strategy and its programs.

In the future, research on terrorist group's Internet presence to radicalize and recruit, should continue to look at the impact on individuals after an event has occurred, an individual has been killed, or a subject has been arrested/caught. A study on such propaganda techniques utilizing social media should be conducted after more time has passed to look back on the impact, or lack thereof.

Future research also needs to open up to the broader question of what the U.S. is doing to safeguard the Internet? This question opens up a multitude of First Amendment issues, many of which need to be examined, especially when it deals with national security. It should also be worthwhile to examine closely what programs and policies the U.S. is undertaking to stop recruitment efforts and create a counter-narrative through the Internet and jihadist websites.

The topics examined in the previous chapters would benefit from additional empirical evidence and research suggested in those areas; limited

research currently exists and without the research, it will be difficult to assess how the U.S. can counter self-radicalization, recruitment, and employ the best CVE programs.

In closing, the findings from this thesis and the proposed future research should be taken into consideration as policymakers are constantly changing and improving existing programs that affect radicalization and recruitment of terrorist groups through the Internet. The United States has adopted a formalized counter-radicalization strategy; however, it is still relatively new and under-developed. The goal of this thesis was to contribute meaningful research and analysis to aid the U.S. in addressing the following problems and create successful programs based off of this research.

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