Radicalization in the U.S. Beyond al Qaeda

Treating the disease of the disconnection

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"A nation must think before it acts."
– Robert Strausz-Hupé

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The attacks of September 11, 2001 spawned a decade of al Qaeda inspired radicalization of disaffected Middle Eastern and North African youth and a handful of young Western men. Ten years later, foreign fighters to Afghanistan, Iraq and other jihadi battlefields appear to be declining while in contrast analysts have pointed to an uptick in United States (U.S.) based "homegrown extremism" - terrorism advocated or committed by U.S. residents or citizens.

Despite recent notions of a spike in al Qaeda inspired homegrown extremism, 2011 brought al Qaeda persistent setbacks. Osama Bin Laden's death at the hands of U.S. Special Operations forces presented al Qaeda its most debilitating blow since its inception. Bin Laden proved to be only the first of many key al Qaeda leaders eliminated in 2011 to include Ilyas Kashmiri, Atiyah Abd al Rahman, Anwar al-Awlaki and Fazul Abdullah Mohammed. Al Qaeda's most significant defeat, however, appears more ideological than operational. A string of Arab revolutions and uprisings beginning in Tunisia ultimately stretched to more than a dozen countries. Regimes designated by al Qaeda as apostate were toppled not by jihadis seeking an Islamic caliphate but by mostly peaceful uprisings seeking democratically elected governments. As of November 2011, small remnants of al Qaeda survive with their only operational hope for executing an attack in the West being the Internet radicalization of lone wolf operatives. Even with its recent setbacks, al Qaeda likely only needs one successful attack by either its organization or an inspired Western lone wolf to reinvigorate its extremism.

Al Qaeda's message, messengers, and Internet outreach currently present only a low-level threat to the U.S. More broadly, future radicalization in the U.S. will likely be symptomatic of the disease of the disconnected – the increased psychological and social isolation of the digital age - more than the appeal of al Qaeda. Radicalization of individual Westerners by al Qaeda or any number of extremist ideologies (domestic or international) will continue at a steady state. Detecting and interdicting these lone wolves will be challenging and requires the U.S. to develop a broad and flexible extremist detection approach promoting information sharing, electronic/Internet surveillance and community engagement from the national to the local level.

Al Qaeda's "Put up or Shut Up" Problem

Al Qaeda finds itself fighting to sustain its organizational existence and social movement. A common argument advanced in counterterrorism circles has been the martyrdom of Bin Laden at any point would provide an enduring symbol rallying recruits to al Qaeda's cause and further inspiring generations of new members. However, the death of Bin Laden, a powerfully symbolic victory for the U.S. after ten years of pursuit, met a collective shrug among al Qaeda's core audience and registered only a blip amidst the turbulent times of the Arab World's 2011. While Western counterterrorism analysts hung on Bin Laden and Zawahiri's every word, popular support for al Qaeda's principal leaders tracked a steady decline in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) over a ten-year period.[1] Many terrorism analysts must now ask themselves: Why didn't Bin Laden's death register a greater impact? Where are the retaliatory attacks to avenge Bin Laden's death? Why has the al Qaeda message not taken on renewed vigor in the wake of Bin Laden's death?

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[1] See the Pew Research Center reports on Osama Bin Laden. (Project, 2011)

Al Qaeda lost its post 9/11 inertia, more than any other reason, because it failed to carry out significant violence against the West. Ten years of relentless al Qaeda advertising failed on all accounts to deliver a significant and sustained blow against the West. Despite brief periods of promise in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and later Yemen, al Qaeda campaigns against U.S. coalitions in all theaters ultimately encountered setbacks. Additionally, al Qaeda failed to replicate the success of its 9/11 operation and since July 2005 has failed to execute a major attack on Westerners in the West.[2] Al Qaeda inspired self-selected recruits did successfully execute a small handful of plots in the U.S. and Europe. However, these attacks have been more recently overshadowed by other incompetent al Qaeda wannabes repeatedly failing to execute poorly designed plots against targets of dubious importance. Brian Jenkins of RAND accurately noted that, "most of the plots could be described as more aspirational than operational."[3] Al Qaeda and those that analyze them portrayed these failed upstarts as indicative of the terror group's global appeal. In retrospect, al Qaeda's bumbling upstarts painted an image of a struggling organization. Their target selection rarely aligned with any larger al Qaeda objective and often appeared to undermine al Qaeda's global message. Thus, successfully sustaining al Qaeda's global stature requires action proportional to its propaganda.

In hindsight, the most important counter to al Qaeda's radicalization is not the countering of al Qaeda's message but the prevention of successful al Qaeda attacks and the destruction of its organization. As the age old adage says, if al Qaeda cannot "put up" the action they advocate, then they must "shut up" their rhetoric. Improvements in the full spectrum of Western counterterrorism efforts deserve credit for al Qaeda's downturn. Federal, state and local law enforcement have rapidly improved their ability to detect and disrupt radicalization and recruitment in the U.S. Meanwhile, Western intelligence and military operations appear to have squelched Al Qaeda's two post-9/11 glimmers of radical inspiration - a Zarqawi-led al Qaeda in Iraq circa 2005-2007 and an Awlaki-inspired al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula from 2009-2011. While it is both possible and probable that al Qaeda will again attack the West in the West, the demise of al Qaeda's senior leadership, the intense military pressure applied against al Qaeda overseas and domestic law enforcement and homeland security improvements will likely prevent this from occurring anytime soon on a scale equivalent to that of 9/11. Thus, al Qaeda will continue to struggle in inspiring new recruits.

Al Qaeda's Radicalization Message Ten Years Later

Successful radicalization hinges on an appealing broad-based message of resistance. In its inception, al Qaeda's justifications for global jihad focused on several key issues most notably outlined by Ayman al-Zawahiri in his 2001 publication *Knights under the Prophet's Banner* and advocated by Bin Laden during numerous fatwas.[4] First, al Qaeda drew a clear focus on

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[2] Note, al Qaeda did execute attacks on Western targets in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. However, none of these were particularly spectacular nor drew sustained interest from U.S. recruits.

[3] (Jenkins, 2010, p. 6)

[4] For a summary of Zawahiri's *Knight under the Prophet's Banner* see Sebastian Gorka's post from 2010 available at the Westminister Institute. (Gorka, 2010)

attacking the "Far" enemy (western nations and specifically the United States) as the impetus behind "Near" enemy (apostate regimes and dictators) oppression of Muslims. Second, al Qaeda declared democracy as pagan and incompatible with Islam. Third, al Qaeda advocated that it was the duty of all Muslims, regardless of geographic or social position, to unite and defend Islam against the oppression of both 'Near' and 'Far' enemies. Fourth, al Qaeda felt American presence in Muslim holy lands provided additional justification for the indiscriminate targeting of not just U.S. military personnel but any American civilians as complacent supporters of Western occupation of Muslim lands. In aggregate, al Qaeda advocated for all Muslims, regardless of their social, religious and geographic position, to take up arms in the name of jihad to overthrow "Near" and "Far" enemies in order to establish a global caliphate ruled by Islamic law.

In the immediate years following the 9/11 attacks, U.S. forces invaded both Afghanistan and Iraq overthrowing Muslim regimes feeding al Qaeda's narrative. Additionally, U.S. counterterrorism alliances with regimes designated as apostate by al Qaeda reinforced the notion that Islam's "Near" enemies were performing the bidding of Islam's "Far" Enemy. Establishment of the Guantanamo Bay terrorist detention camp along with the prisoner abuses of Abu Ghraib reinforced al Qaeda's popular narrative of a Western war on Islam. Subsequently, foreign fighters poured into Iraq seeking retribution for both perceived and real injustices to Muslims and an opportunity to fulfill al Qaeda's call for global jihad.

By the end of 2007, Al Qaeda's message began to falter when compared with the reality of their actions. Foreign fighter recruits to Iraq increasingly found themselves fighting to achieve local insurgent objectives as much as al Qaeda's global objectives. Al Qaeda in Iraq's violence against fellow Muslims undermined the group's popular support resulting in local Sunni groups siding with U.S. forces. In 2007, al Qaeda called for Muslims to pursue jihad on behalf of al Shabaab opposing the Ethiopian incursion into Somalia. A handful of foreign fighters from the West, the majority being members of Somali Diaspora communities, answered the call. However, this new jihadi front found few takers in total, which signaled a general disinterest amongst MENA youth to pursue an al Qaeda endorsed campaign on behalf of a non-Arab group or against a non-Western adversary. As of 2011, the U.S. drawdown in Iraq nears completion and the troop commitment to Afghanistan will likely decrease substantially over the next three years. Thus, al Qaeda's argument that the U.S. intends the takeover of Muslim lands has proven to be untrue.

The Arab Spring of 2011 provides the greatest refutation of al Qaeda's message and demonstrates the collapse of al Qaeda's support in several ways. First, the West, in most cases, has supported the transition of populace movements over authoritarian dictators and in turn significantly undermined al Qaeda's narrative of the "Far" enemy propping up "Near" enemy regimes. In particular, the West intervened diplomatically to assist in Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's resignation and provided military support to topple the regime of Muamar Gadhafi in Libya. Second, Arab youth, the core recruiting pool of al Qaeda, participated in revolutions and uprisings across MENA largely overthrowing alleged apostate regimes through non-violent protest. Al Qaeda never accomplished the overthrow of a "Near" enemy regime and played no role in the Arab Spring. Third, Arab Spring revolutions sought

not the establishment of a global Caliphate but instead democratic elections. While many of the parties and politicians vying for power seek the establishment of state's adhering to Islamic law, all of these nations pursued a government transition through a democratic process – a thorough denouncement of the principles preached in al Qaeda's message.[5]

Recently, American-centric al Qaeda messaging, amplified by the English ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki, yielded a small contingent of recruits self-radicalizing via the Internet and either joining al Qaeda overseas or initiating independent, AQ-inspired attacks inside the U.S. Analysis of those implicated in terrorism plots since 2008 suggests the key drivers of this American radicalization hinge more on ethnic identity, psychological and social factors than ideological justifications. Brian Jenkins accurately noted, "we have no metric for measuring faith, but the attraction of the jihadists' extremist ideology for these individuals appears to have had more to do with participating in action than religious instruction…few of America's accused terrorists seem to have arrived at jihadism through a process of profound spiritual discernment."[6] Examination of the 68 American Muslims implicated in al Qaeda affiliated or inspired terrorism from 2008 through 2011 shows nearly one third were connected to the Minneapolis-al Shabaab recruitment ring comprised almost entirely of second and third generation Somali-Americans.[7] This group recruitment appears generated more by Somali identity and peer relationships than al Qaeda messaging. Several other self-recruits, to include the case of U.S. Army Major Nidal Hasan, demonstrate how psychological issues and social isolation drove receptiveness to al Qaeda more than the efficacy of a particular al Qaeda message.

In conclusion, Western downsizing of conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the democratic uprisings of the Arab Spring, and the notable lack of American recruit ideological discernment suggests al Qaeda's ideological message will garner little traction without the potential inspiration generated by a renewed attack on the West.

Al Qaeda Messengers: The Fallacy of Perpetual Influence

Al Qaeda's influence comes as much or more from its messengers than its message. Bin Laden's charisma and backstory provided a powerful vehicle enticing al Qaeda recruits before the 9/11 attacks. As noted relentlessly by counterterrorism analysts, the Internet further empowered Bin Laden's message and al Qaeda's recruitment creating an enduring portal for his influence of future jihadi recruits. Similar to the "Long Tail" phenomenon of online marketing, counterterrorism analysts have advocated that al Qaeda's message and messengers will endure, radicalize and recruit new members long after their deaths.

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[5] See Dr. Will McCants article "Al Qaeda's Challenge" (McCants, Al Qaeda's Challenge: The Jihadists' War With Islamist Democrats, 2011)

[6] (Jenkins, 2010, p. 3)

[7] For a database and supporting analysis of Muslim Americans arrested, indicted, convicted or implicated in terrorism from September 2001 through the end of 2010, see Dr. Charles Kurzman's database available at: http://kurzman.unc.edu/muslim-american-terrorism/ and his companion book *The Missing Martyrs: Why There Are So Few Muslim Terrorists*. (Kurzman, The Missing Martyrs: Why There Are So Few Muslim Terrorists, 2011)

Analysts suggested the 'martyrdom' of Zarqawi, Bin Laden and Awlaki would further inspire generations of jihadi recruits and retaliatory attacks. Surprisingly, these forecasts have yet to materialize. For example, after Zarqawi's death in Iraq in 2006, some analysts believed Zarqawi's legend would live on and inspire further rounds of al Qaeda recruits to Iraq. However, the influx of foreign fighter recruits dropped precipitously by 2008 for a variety of reasons; one of the foremost being that a dead Zarqawi inspires far fewer recruits than a live and active Zarqawi. Much in the same way Bin Laden found inspiration in the writings and recitations of Abdullah Azzam or Sayyid Qutb, the West can expect some young Arab men and lost Western souls will be radicalized to al Qaeda's cause by the Internet messages of past al Qaeda heroes. However, these three post mortem messengers alone will not generate the volume or quality of recruits needed to regenerate al Qaeda's ranks.

Who will lead al Qaeda's next wave of radicalization?
Al Qaeda needs a new inspirational messenger to ramp up its global radicalization and recruitment. Only a select few al Qaeda leaders have actually generated significant audience to radicalize many recruits. Three of al Qaeda's most effective messengers, Bin Laden, Zarqawi and Awlaki, all blended a unique combination of competence and charisma to radicalize and inspire recruits. Bin Laden combined a transformational riches-to-rags story, anti-Soviet mujahedeen participation and ideological preaching to build popular support. Zarqawi emerged as a man of the people leading spectacular attacks in Iraq. Awlaki combined Yemeni-American ancestry and English speaking ability to radicalize recruits at a distance via the Internet. After the loss of these three top recruiters, what al Qaeda members retain similar qualities that can help radicalize al Qaeda's next wave?

Few al Qaeda leaders remain to assume the role of lead radicalizer and recruiter. According to the Washington Post's Glen Miller, "the leadership ranks of the main al Qaeda terrorist network, once expansive enough to supervise the plot for Sept. 11, 2001, have been reduced to just two figures whose demise would mean the group's defeat."[8] Of those two only Ayman al-Zawahiri remains alive—the other Abu Yahya al-Libi was allegedly killed in a U.S. drone strike in June 2012—from al Qaeda's core senior leadership. Zawahiri appears to lack the needed combination of charisma, competence and action to inspire a significant number of far off recruits. Prior to Awlaki's rise, many analysts predicted two other American al Qaeda members, Adam Gadahn and Omar Hammimi, would be decisive radicalizers of Western men but the evidence to support these predictions seems scant. Neither a master of militant ideology nor an al Qaeda leader of operational action, Gadahn appears in al Qaeda videos to represent nothing more than what he is - a lost American soul perpetually searching for group belonging. In contrast, Gadahn's shortcomings could seemingly be filled by Omar Hammami, a young American recruit actively engaging in jihad with al-Shabaab. Despite directly engaging in violence (like Zarqawi), some combination of Hammami's youth, limited ideological knowledge or general societal disinterest in Somalia render him no more effective a messenger than Gadahn. (Since submission of this article, Hammami appears to have been shunned by al-Shabaab's senior leadership and may be on the run.) In conclusion, there appears no heir apparent to effectively deliver al Qaeda's message on a large scale.

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[8] (Miller, 2011)

Al Qaeda's Radicalization Processes at the End of 2011: Limited and Low Yield

New research and analysis continues to explore al Qaeda's radicalization processes. Noemie Bouhana and Per-Olof H. Wikstrom's recent study for the UK Home Office evaluates al Qaeda radicalization through a Situational Action Theory framework. Under this outline, they examine, "how people, through social and self-selection, come to be exposed to … radicalizing settings."[9] Their findings provide further illustration of when exposure to al Qaeda messaging appears particularly effective.

> "Membership of a social network containing one or more radicalized member, or containing a member connected in some way to one or more radicalizing settings, is one of the main factors linked to exposure to radicalizing influence. That the Internet does not appear to play a significant role in AQIR (Al Qaeda Influenced Radicalization) might be surprising, given that it is the social networking medium par excellence. However, the fact that the technology presents obstacles to the formation of intimate bonds could explain the counter-intuitive finding. Personal attachments to radicalizing agents, be they peers, recruiters, or moral authority figures, play a prominent role in AQIR."[10]

In both the context of Arab foreign fighters and Western al Qaeda recruits, it is physical-social radicalization not virtual radicalization that generates the most committed, most capable and largest volume of al Qaeda recruits. As seen in analysis of Muslim-American al Qaeda recruits since 9/11/2001, the most significant and pervasive recruitment occurred via physical-social radicalization by groups of men inspiring each other. In total, The Lackawanna 6, Portland 7, Virginia Paintball group, Northern Virginia Pakistan group, Liberty City Group, Ft. Dix 6, Newburgh Four, Minneapolis Somali recruits to Shabaab, Folsom Prison Four, and the North Carolina Boyd group constitute 75 of 161 cases involving Muslim Americans implicated in terrorism from 2001 through 2010.[11] These groups demonstrate the power of physical-social radicalization.

Today, American counterterrorism improvements severely limit al Qaeda's ability to conduct physical-social radicalization in the U.S. Few if any veteran al Qaeda foreign fighters reside in the U.S. and those that do surface now draw scrutiny from law enforcement and local communities.[12] As seen by Anwar al-Awlaki's 2002 exit from a Falls Church, Virginia mosque, radical clerics openly advocating jihad in the U.S. draw close scrutiny from counterterrorism personnel and Muslim American community members.[13] Recent cases of physical-social radicalization occur more often outside religious sanctuaries than inside them. Even these

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[9] (Wikstrom, 2011, p. vii)

[10] (Wikstrom, 2011, p. x)

[11] This calculation was conducted by the author using the data of Dr. Charles Kurzman found at http://kurzman.unc.edu/muslim-american-terrorism/.

[12] (Jenkins, 2010)

[13] Discussion of this phenomenon can be found in two sources: (Berger, 2011) and (Watts, Major Nidal Hasan and the Fort Hood Tragedy: Implications for the U.S. Armed Forces, June 2011)

alternative group radicalization spots are routinely uncovered by law enforcement. Thus, the remaining portal for al Qaeda to reach and radicalize Americans is the Internet.

Virtual radicalization and recruitment provides al Qaeda low volumes of weak recruits executing fumbled plots leading to a lowering of the terror group's global stature. Al Qaeda's virtual recruitment generates a multitude of signals detectable by Western electronic surveillance – a counterterrorism capability vastly improved in the past ten years. Do-it-yourself jihadi distance-learning provides no substitute for the real thing – actual physical training in an al Qaeda camp. True, the Internet continues to attract disparate Americans seeking an ideological cause, but these methods appear insufficient for reinvigorating al Qaeda's message or uniting disparate lone-wolf extremists to collectively execute a substantial attack in the U.S.

But what about the spike in "Homegrown Extremism"?
Despite declining resonance of al Qaeda's message, elimination of key al Qaeda messengers, and the low yield of al Qaeda's online recruiting, many assert a spike in U.S. "homegrown extremism." These calls seemed reasonable after roughly twenty young, Minneapolis-based Somali-Americans joined al Shabaab in Somalia and Major Nidal Hasan executed a lone wolf attack at Ft. Hood. Analysts and policymakers quickly called for programs to counter the perceived wave of extremism sweeping the U.S.

Retrospective analysis of the plots and the plotters since 9/11 shows little indication of a spike in homegrown extremism. Four recent academic publications provide an improved understanding of the recent cases of al Qaeda inspired extremism in the U.S.: Risa Brooks' "Muslim 'Homegrown' Terrorism in the United States"[14], Jenkins' "Would be Warriors"[15], Kurzman, Schanzer and Mosa's "Muslim American Terrorism since 9/11"[16] and Bouhana and Wikstrom's "al Qaeda-influence Radicalization".[17] Each of these reports provides data driven analysis and context to recent terror plots in the U.S. Risa Brooks' analysis, like the other reports, concludes:

> "Muslim homegrown terrorism does not at present appear to constitute a serious threat to their (Americans) welfare. Nor is there a significant analytical or evidentiary basis for anticipating that it will become one in the near future. It does not appear that Muslim Americans are increasingly motivated or capable of engaging in terrorist attacks against their fellow citizens and residents."[18]

Both quantitative and qualitative analysis of homegrown extremist cases suggest al Qaeda radicalization continues at a sustained low level rendering few substantial threats annually. First, Brian Jenkins notes Muslim American rates of extremism from 2001 to 2009 averaged to roughly one incident per every 30,000 American Muslims.[19] Even further, Jenkins determined

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[14] (Brooks, 2011)
[15] (Jenkins, 2010)
[16] (Charles Kurzman, 2011)
[17] (Wikstrom, 2011)
[18] (Brooks, 2011)
[19] (Jenkins, 2010, p. vii)

U.S. rates of terrorism since 9/11/2001 are lower than the U.S. rates of terrorism encountered during the 1970's. Jenkins, like Brooks, asserts, "there is no evidence that America's Muslim community is getting more radical."[20] Second, the year 2009 registered 48 Muslim-American terrorism suspects and perpetrators – the highest single year total since 9/11/2001. However, 17 of these 48 individuals were Somali-Americans recruited in mass from Minneapolis to al Shabaab in Somalia.[21] The following year, 2010, witnessed a more than 50% drop in total homegrown cases of extremism. Does 2009, then, represent a growing trend or an aberration? Third, trends in homegrown extremism will prove difficult to assess since the event being investigated is quite rare. Charles Kurzman's data shows a ten-year average of only 16.1 Muslim-American terrorism suspects and perpetrators per year with no sustained increase over time. At such low annual rates, arrests of any radical cell during a given year can easily be construed as a 'spike'. Fourth, determining when a spike in radicalization begins or ends is especially difficult as radicalization can occur over many months or years. In the example of Minneapolis-Somalis joining al-Shabaab, the recruits were detected and implicated in 2008 but their radicalization appears to have started as early as the beginning of 2007. So when was the spike? January 2007, July 2007, July 2008?[22] At present, this author believes the rate of homegrown extremist radicalization and recruitment to al Qaeda appears to be at no more than a steady state.

Future Radicalization: What Can We Expect?

Accurate predictions of al Qaeda's rise and violence both before and after September 11, 2001 have proven quite rare. Likewise, making forecasts on sparse data garnered from infrequent homegrown terrorism cases will remain a challenge. However, recent cases of 'homegrown extremism' may suggest three characteristics of future radicalization: 1) a persistent, low rate of radicalization across the U.S. population; 2) a sustained or increased proportion of lone wolf rather than group radicalization; and 3) radicalization generated from a more diffuse set of extremist ideologies with al Qaeda being one of many rather than the predominant inspiration for 'homegrown extremism'.

Wolves: 'Alone' not in 'Packs'- Treating the Disease of the Disconnected
Emergence of radicalized groups of young men undetected by law enforcement appears less likely than in previous times. Aside from the Somali youth recruited to al Shabaab from Minneapolis (the group departed the U.S. and avoided detection before travel), al Qaeda inspired and other extremist group formations have been routinely disrupted in the U.S.[23] Despite these law enforcement successes, the marked rise in lone wolf extremism proves a remaining viable method for attacking the U.S. homeland. These plots represent the greatest radicalization threat to the U.S. as lone wolfs are the most difficult to detect and interdict. Major Nidal Hasan's 2009 Ft. Hood attack provides the most representative U.S. example and

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[20] (Jenkins, 2010, pp. viii,12)
[21] (Charles Kurzman, 2011)
[22] See (Berger, Al Shabab's recruiting pipeline from Minnesota to Somalia detailed in new filing, 2011) and (Watts, Debunking the Spike in Homegrown Extremism, 2011)
[23] Al Qaeda inspired groups are not the only groups disrupted by the FBI and state and local law enforcement in the U.S. The 2009-2010 case of the Hutaree militia in Michigan provides another example of extremist groups being penetrated by informants and improved law enforcement procedures.

Anders Behring Breivik's 2011 attack in Norway represents a particularly frightening case as well. Breivik's radicalization, planning and execution provide the most sophisticated example of homegrown extremism seen to date and likely provides valuable lessons learned to anyone desiring to execute a similar attack elsewhere.

Most lone wolf extremist analysis focuses narrowly on militant Islam as the culprit for radicalization. Further analysis of the perpetrators suggests this ideological focus misses the larger set of issues generating lone wolf radicalization. Jenkins notes that, "few of America's accused terrorists seem to have arrived at jihadism through a process of profound spiritual discernment."[24] Some homegrown extremists rigorously delve into ideological scripture, but for many, their understanding of militant Islam is thin and pulled disparately from the Internet. Overall, lone wolf radicalization may not be due to the appeal of al Qaeda's message as much as it is indicative of a new generation of Americans suffering from the disease of being disconnected – a plight of depressed, socially isolated, and mentally vulnerable youth more connected virtually with society than physically. As noted in a recent American Pediatrics Report, many maturing in the digital age encounter a social media paradox where, "potential harms are cyberbullying, social anxiety, severe isolation, and now what doctors are identifying as Facebook depression."[25] The growth of the American digital generation will likely further isolate, troubled young men, and empower their radicalization and subsequent lone wolf attacks in support of any number of ideologies. Understanding this phenomenon requires the examination of lone wolf radicalization decoupled from a narrow focus on al Qaeda. As noted by Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko in their book *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us,* the "difficulty with the bad-ideology account of terrorism is that it is not easily generalized from one kind of terrorism to another."[26] Al Qaeda ideology alone cannot explain the radicalization of disparate characters around the U.S. – a more robust examination of lone wolf/homegrown extremism is needed.

Several other domestic extremist ideologies outside of militant Islam have inspired homegrown extremism in recent years. Violent elements of the Sovereign Citizens Movement have increased their rhetoric and violence in recent years while the most sophisticated improvised explosive device attack attempted in the U.S. to date came not from an inspired al Qaeda operative but from an American military veteran, Kevin Harpham, who held connections to the white supremacist movement.[27] Emerging militant activity surrounding anti-government and anti-corporate agendas in the U.S. should be addressed as well. In addition, the return of a decade's worth of military combat veterans dealing with high unemployment, social isolation, and psychological trauma should also be of concern. Timothy McVeigh, Eric Rudolph and now Kevin Harpham provide three examples of how disenfranchised veterans can fall onto an extremist path. In conclusion, the U.S. can better address emerging radicalization in the U.S. by thinking more broadly about the combination of social and psychological factors and variety of ideologies (inclusive of, but not limited to al Qaeda) that may generate future homegrown extremism.

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[24] (Jenkins, 2010, p. 3)
[25] (Gwenn Schurgin O'Keefe, 2011, p. 1)
[26] (McCauley, 2011, p. 5)
[27] See (Counterterrorism Analysis Unit, 2011) and (Kauder, 2011).

Future Radicalization: What Can We Do?

Ten years of counterterrorism lessons learned provide the basis for reshaping a broader U.S. approach to countering violent extremism. The approach should remove some of the least productive elements of the past decade's efforts and build resources and processes more effective and efficient for identifying and interdicting homegrown extremism.

- *Cease large scale training for law enforcement officers on militant Islam*

  U.S. efforts to counter violent extremism since 9/11/2001 have included teaching the principles of militant Islam to law enforcement officers. In retrospect, this training appears expensive, often incorrect in its content, highly inconsistent in its delivery and quite possibly counterproductive for countering violent extremism.[28] The complete lack of a standardized curriculum and certified instructors results in wildly variable militant Islam instruction enabling counterproductive stereotypes that undermine law enforcement community engagement programs and alienate vulnerable communities. Teaching of militant Islamic extremism should end and in its place should be a broader set of training on radicalization and extremism encompassing those indicators potentially precipitating violence for any and all ideologies.

- *Increase information sharing from federal to local levels regarding electronic surveillance*

  The emergence of lone wolf extremism provides few indicators. Electronic communications and social media posts often provide some of the only clues permitting law enforcement to begin preempting homegrown extremism. U.S. federal agencies hosting advanced electronic surveillance resources able to detect these signals of radical emergence must perfect the authorized exchange of information across all law enforcement agencies.[29]

- *Continue the expansion of community engagement with and beyond Muslim communities*

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[28] With regards to militant Islam instruction, here are several reasons why this author believes its instruction to law enforcement officers should be completely eliminated or majorly reformed. First, the average law enforcement officer is unlikely to ever encounter any form of militant Islam in the pursuit of their duties. Second, a short course of four hours or less taught in an auditorium filled with hundreds of officers does not adequately prepare a law enforcement officer to accurately detect militant Islamic extremism on U.S. streets. If anything, such familiarization training only provides a cursory examination of militant Islam with no practical application likely leading to counterproductive implementation of the information through incorrect stereotypes. Third, the content taught during militant Islam courses adheres to no specific standard with presented information often including highly biased and outright untrue information. Due to a lack of comprehensive research examining militant Islamic extremism in the U.S. and the lack of centralized auditing, militant Islam training content to law enforcement represents nothing more than the random bits of uninformed gibberish.   Likewise, instructors presenting militant Islam quite often hold no particular expertise in the subject matter and have not been evaluated or certified by any central federal government entity.

[29] However, Nidal Hasan's email communication with Anwar al-Awlaki illustrates how this information sharing can go wrong. See J.M. Berger's book *Jihad Joe* for additional information. (Berger, 2011)

Community engagement programs provide additional detection capability and more importantly increased interdiction capability with homegrown radicals. U.S. law enforcement has dramatically increased its community-oriented policing strategies with the Muslim community leading to increased detection and preemption of extremism. However, as noted by Kurzman and Jenkins, the past decade's incidents of Muslim-American extremism provide no particular profile and provide no basis to conclude that extremists will reside in Muslim communities. In addition, if an extremist does reside in a Muslim community, there is no reason to assume that the Muslim community will be aware of potential extremists in their midst. Emerging radicalization threatening the U.S. may very well emerge from vulnerable, non-Muslim communities. Law enforcement should now begin placing more emphasis on expanding their community engagement in all communities where extremist ideology may emerge.

- *Sustain the use of informants and intelligence-led law enforcement approaches*

    Successfully countering violent extremism and its resulting attacks requires a preemptive approach. No single preemption technique works better than the expanded use of informants – a proven practice honed by law enforcement for many decades. Some recent articles argue against law enforcement's expanded use of informants citing 1) entrapment of innocent suspects or 2) alienation of vulnerable communities.[30] Both of these arguments are misguided. For the former, Brooks' article appropriately noted that U.S. prosecutor declination rates of terrorism-related offenses has increased substantially in recent years suggesting the necessary checks to prevent the unlawful pursuit of innocent subjects are in place.[31] For the latter, community engagement with vulnerable communities alone will not provide the necessary safe guards to preempt terrorist radicalization. As witnessed by the more than twenty Somali-Americans recruited to al Shabaab from Minneapolis, communities and parents know some but not all of what their young men are doing. Law enforcement's use of informants should not be a single-point solution but complimentary to the community engagement approaches being implemented by law enforcement. Additionally, community engagement and informant operations should be planned and designed within the larger context of intelligence-led policing operations – a data driven approach focused on preventing rather than reacting to crime and terrorism.

- *Detect extremists electronically and engage with them physically*

    The Internet provides the method for both accessing extremist content and detecting those being radicalized by extremist content. Despite this early warning mechanism, the expansion of e-investigation by both law enforcement and counterterrorism analysts has led to excessive focus on the part of many to detect, de-radicalize or

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[30] A recent example of analysis advocating a narrow focus on the Muslim community and advocating a decrease in informant operations in law enforcement see the New American Foundation report *Countering Domestic Radicalization*. (Fishman, 2011)
[31] (Brooks, 2011)

disrupt terrorists through a flurry of mouse clicks in the comfort of one's home or office. This rearward investigative approach is costly, time-consuming, and prone to error. While Google's calls for positive engagement may be noble, their Internet-enabled countering violent extremism concepts misunderstand the process of radicalization and provide a costly indirect and less effective radicalization interdiction method to physical engagement.[32] Google and others advocating Internet extremist interdiction might better use their resources and interrupt radicalization by proactively removing the vast quantities of extremist content residing on their servers and violating their own terms of service.[33] (YouTube, owned by Google, being one such platform - see the endnote for additional discussion on this point.)

Electronic detection followed by physical engagement provides a more effective method for disrupting homegrown extremism. A more appropriate blend of effort and resources for countering homegrown extremism might follow a spectrum of key tasks to include:

1- *Identify and remove extremist content* from U.S. and partner nation servers through established legal processes and cooperation with the private sector.

2- *Detect online extremist radicalization* through electronic surveillance and rapidly share this information with law enforcement and homeland security officials to initiate physical engagement with advocates of extremism.

3- *Expand community engagement across all communities* for additional detection capability and further means of extremist interdiction.

4- *Directly and physically engage those being radicalized.* Law enforcement and their local community partners should physically preempt those demonstrating extremist sympathies. This engagement could use a combination of intermediaries to include family, community leaders, law enforcement, social workers, and reformed extremists who are particularly effective in deescalating extremists moving down the path of radicalization.

5- *Monitor and interdict those committed to extremism* through informants, surveillance and preemptive law enforcement. For some radicalized in the U.S., there is no de-escalating their intent to commit violence. Law

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[32] See three sources reference this debate: (McCants, Don't Be Evil: What Google doesn't get about violent extremism - and how it can do better, 2011), (Foust, 2011) and discussion 1-5 of *Countering Violent Extremism Online* at (Watts, 2011).

[33] Recent initiatives by the online community to disrupt radicalization through positive e-marketing appear well intentioned in their design but ineffective, costly and inappropriate in their execution. Often times those seeking militant ideologies and the connection of an online movement such as al Qaeda's choose this outlet due to their social and physical isolation. No amount of positive messaging bombardment will bring the most committed to violence – a small cadre likely numbering one to two dozen annually- back from the brink. For an excellent new book describing these radicalization process see *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us.* (McCauley, 2011).

enforcement at all levels should continue their proactive policing when direct intervention with extremists is infeasible or insufficient to deter.

- *Develop countering violent extremism resources and expertise at the national level as on-call resources for state and local jurisdictions.* The U.S. is the most diverse society in the world providing freedoms that permit the pursuit of an unlimited number of ideologies and causes; the vast majority of which are peaceful. However, a certain percentage of the U.S. population at any given time will pursue an international or domestic extremist agenda against the U.S. government and its citizens. Training more than 700,000 state and local law enforcement to know, understand and detect each and every form of extremist ideology that might emerge in a local jurisdiction is impractical, expensive and ineffective. A more sensible approach may be for the federal government to provide a national package of resources and support for state and local officials to detect homegrown radicalization. These resources might include:

    a. In person and online training providing general principles for detecting radicalization processes (regardless of the ideology) with a specific focus on spotting the criminal acts and violent rhetoric correlating with extremism.

    b. A resource database accessible by state and local law officials outlining the propaganda, websites, principles, and case studies of all extremist ideologies present in the U.S.

    c. A national outreach capability for state and local law enforcement officers to contact experts in any given extremist ideology to obtain assistance in detecting, engaging or disrupting extremists in local communities.

    d. An on-call/as needed contact team of experts and experienced practitioners capable of deploying to local jurisdictions and assisting communities facing an unfamiliar homegrown extremist threat.

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