THE LONE WOLF, THE YOUNG LION, AND THE IMPRESSIONABLE AMERICAN: 
THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS ON HOMEGROWN ISLAMIC 
EXTREMISM

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By

Nick H. Goracy

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Nick H. Goracy

Thesis Adviser: William F. Daddio, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the impact of social media platforms on jihadist extremist recruitment of United States citizens thus contributing to homegrown terrorism. By virtue of analyzing a split timeline of individual case studies, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that the existence of the “like” button on social platforms plays a key aspect in the redefinition of jihadist recruitment of American citizens. In other words, with the presence of the “like” button and the subsequent ability for users to validate content, radical groups have been able to evolve and manipulate their recruitment approach in an accelerated fashion (as displayed by the selected case studies). These case studies are split in a format that includes three cases of successful homegrown recruitment before the social media boom of 2008 and three cases after. By virtue of a variety of interviews with members of the US military, Middle Eastern theologians, as well as social media security experts within the United States, the results of the thesis process seeks to address major recruitment strategy changes by terror groups in accommodation to social media consumers. Ranging from the Virginia Jihad Network (“Paintball Gang”) to the recent events in Massachusetts involving Usaamah Rahim and David Wright, this document finds that all case studies had some form of socio-economic challenges and adopted radical Islam not for sudden religious inclination, but rather to offer themselves a sense of purpose and/or achievement. The
“like” button on social media platforms has allowed for a change in recruitment tactics that evolved from the various patterns of traditional Al Qaeda mass propaganda distribution (via email, encrypted messages, etc.) to what is witnessed in the modern day with the Islamic State. While attempting to naturalize the extreme violence via electronic distribution (ex: online video-streaming platforms), the Islamic State has effectively developed a recruitment process that involves the journey of the “young lion”, a self-created anecdote for the youthful, “brave”, followers that attempt to join its cause. With constant reaffirmation and connection, the “like” button provides the recruit with instant validation pertaining to their conversion and radicalization.

Security Concerns

The term Operations Security (OPSEC) [has also been referred to as operational security] has been repeated time and time again throughout the construction of this thesis. While having been granted access to sources such as retired US Navy SEAL Rob Sarver and former US Army Green Beret, John Doyle, there are many sources and interviewees that have requested anonymity as opposed to their actual names. Per their request and by virtue of the necessity for privacy and security, their names have been redacted. Due to the intense danger that coincides with their occupations, in some cases I can only address their service branch without addressing other background information in any manner whatsoever. These sources have made themselves available to me within a schedule that requires them to constantly defend the United States in multiple avenues. I have had the pleasure to speak with these men and women candidly; their words and input are utilized and referenced throughout this piece without manipulation in any manner.
Out of respect for those that have made themselves available as well as in regard of this piece, I ask that my reader hold these sources as credible. While there is an element of trust that is involved with engaging in this thesis, I hope to prove that such unique and in-depth viewpoints presented by these sources make themselves not only apparent, but act as proof of the professionalism and experience that these men and women offer. In terms of academic integrity, I can only pledge that these sources have come not only highly recommended, but having been briefed on their experiences, I can testify that they are more than equipped to address the topical nature of this piece. In total, these men and women, along with those whose names are declassified, have granted me over 100 hours of interview material and have provided countless textual and multi-media sources.

It should also be noted that this piece does not seek to offend any creed, race, or religion. While the discussion of radical Islam is one of extreme relevance, there remains space where some may be offended. Within this document is a list of definitions and terms, many of which are Arabic. There are multiple interpretations of many of these words, these definitions exist to show exactly the direction and understanding of these words by myself and those who have contributed towards this piece. Personally, I consider Islam and its followers to be peaceful in nature; the abuse of this religion has made itself apparent on a world scale thus resulting in an extremely stressful and sad condition for its peaceful and faithful followers.

Additionally, this piece discusses topics such as socio-economic status, education, as well as physical/mental conditions. In no way does the discussion of these situations extend past the study at hand or are a totalitarian reflection of my own personal beliefs. They are brought to light...
in order to enhance certain elements of my argument as well as to support claims and occurrences concerning the case studies.

I thank my reader in advance for their understanding and trust.

Glossary

Islamic Terms¹
(All terms sourced from ClarionProject).

caliphate. An Islamic State where Sharia is the basis of governance; usually used in reference to past Islamic empires in the Middle East.

fawa. The proselytizing of Islam.

fatwa. A legal ruling made according to Sharia

hajj. Pilgrimage made to Mecca that is required of all capable Muslims.

halal. Arabic word for "permissible" under Islamic law

ikwhan. Arabic for "Brotherhood," usually in reference to the Muslim Brotherhood.

imam. Religious authority figure; usually the leader of a mosque.

Islamism. The interpretation of Islam as a governmental system in which strict Sharia law must be enforced; synonymous with Political Islam.

jihad. A holy war waged against non-Muslims on behalf of Islam considered to be a religious duty; also, a personal struggle in devotion to Islam.

mujahideen. Religiously-motivated fighters that volunteer to wage Jihad against the enemies of Islam.

salafist (wahhabism). Islamic movement formed in the early 20th century that holds that

¹ (All Terms) "Glossary of Islamic Terms." ClarionProject.org. 2016.
Muslims must reject much of modernity and replicate the lifestyle of Mohammed and early Islamic authorities; often used synonymously with Wahhabism.

**salat.** Arabic for “prayer,” required by Islamic law (Sharia) to be performed five times per day.

**shahada.** A declaration required by Islamic law saying that a person believes that Allah is the one God and Mohammed is his messenger.

**sharia.** A legal framework to regulate public and private aspects of life based upon specific Islamic teachings. Sharia is a strict system which views non-Muslims as second-class citizens, sanctions inequality between men and women and prescribes cruel and unusual punishments for crimes.

**sharia finance.** Investments into funds approved by Islamic scholars as being Sharia-compliant; often referred to as "Islamic banking."

**Shiites.** Branch of Islam that represents 10-15% of Muslims. Shiites believe that Muhammed divinely ordained his cousin and son-in-law Ali to be the next caliph making Ali and his direct descendants Muhammed's successors.

**sunna.** Proper behavior as represented by the life of Mohammed and written in the ahadith; often used synonymously with ahadith.

**Sunnis.** Branch of Islam that represents 85-90% of Muslims. Sunnis believe that Abu Bakr, the father of Muhammad's wife Aisha, was Muhammad's rightful successor and that the method of choosing leaders is the consensus of the Muslim community.

**takfir.** The act of declaring ones fellow muslim to be a non-believer. It is a legal categorization for which the sentence is traditionally death, which must be handed down by an Islamic Court.

**taqiyya.** Arabic for “deceit” or “dissimulation.” According to certain Islamic interpretations, Muslims are allowed to lie in certain situations such as to deceive their enemies, particularly non-Muslims.

**ummah.** Worldwide community of Muslims.

**zakat.** Obligatory donation of income in Islam.
Social Media Terms (Twitter)\(^2\)
(All terms sourced from Twitter).

**deactivation.** If you deactivate your account, it goes into a queue for permanent deletion from Twitter in 30 days. You may reactivate your account within the 30 day grace period.

**direct messages.** Direct Messages are private messages sent from one Twitter user to another Twitter users. You can use Direct Messages for one-on-one private conversations, or between groups of users.

**follow.** Subscribing to a Twitter account is called “following.” To start following, click the Follow button next to the user name or on their profile page to see their Tweets as soon as they post something new. Anyone on Twitter can follow or unfollow anyone else at any time, with the exception of blocked accounts.

**follow count.** This count reflects how many people you follow and how many follow you; these numbers are found on your Twitter profile.

**geolocation, geotagging.** Adding a location to your tweet (a geolocation or geotag) tells those who see your Tweet where you were when you posted that Tweet.

**hacking.** Gaining unauthorized access to an account via phishing, password guessing, or session stealing. Usually this is followed by unauthorized posts from the account. Hacked accounts are sometimes referred to as "compromised."

header Photo. Your personal image that you upload, which appears at the top of your profile.

like (n.). Liking a Tweet indicates that you appreciate it. You can find all of your likes by clicking the likes tab on your profile.

profile photo. Your personal image found under the Me icon. It's also the picture that appears next to each of your Tweets.

protected tweets. Tweets are public by default. Choosing to protect your Tweets means that your Tweets will only be seen by your followers.

retweet (n.). A Tweet that you forward to your followers is known as a Retweet. Often used to pass along news or other valuable discoveries on Twitter, Retweets always retain original attribution.

timestamp. The date and time a Tweet was posted to Twitter. A Tweet's timestamp can be found in grey text in the detail view of any Tweet.

tweet (n.). A Tweet may contain photos, videos, links and up to 140 characters of text.

twitter. An information network made up of 140-character messages (including photos, videos and links) from all over the world.
Social Media Terms (Facebook)³
(All Terms Sourced from Facebook).

block. You can block someone to unfriend them and limit the ways they can get in touch with you on Facebook. Blocking can help stop someone from bothering you on Facebook.

Blocked can also mean that Facebook has temporarily restricted you from using a specific feature or multiple features, but you can still access your account.

follow. Follow is a way to hear from people you’re interested in, even if you’re not friends. The Follow button is also a way to fine-tune your News Feed to get the types of updates you want to see.

like. Clicking Like is a way to give positive feedback and connect with things you care about.

³ “Glossary of Terms”. Facebook. 2016.
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I would like to thank my family, friends, and the individuals that have made this thesis become a reality. In terms of the countless hours of interviews and suggestions, I owe a great thanks to (Ret.) SEAL LT. Rob Sarver and his wife Heather. Rob, without your guidance, input, and assistance in contacting fellow servicemen, this project would not have been able to yield such impactful results. I am honored to call you a friend and mentor. I would also like to thank Mr. John Doyle for hosting me at Palantir and allowing multiple interviews to transpire despite his busy schedule. Mr. Doyle, your continued service is just a small indication of the caliber man you are.

To those names that have been redacted for security reasons in this piece, I offer my most sincere thanks. While no credit falls to your name within this piece, your knowledge and
experience have helped form an argument that has never been made before in an academic setting; it has been an honor to work with you. My thanks extends to all of our U.S. Servicemen and Women and their families.

Special thanks are also necessary for Professor William “Bill” Daddio. Thank you for your countless hours of input and conversation, I have learned so much from you that even extends beyond this topic, it has been a pleasure.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ................................................................. 1
Chapter I: Have We Seen this Before? ........................................ 8
Chapter II: The Call of the Lone Wolf........................................... 26
Chapter III: Channeling Lions: From the Middle East to Manhattan .................. 46
Chapter IV: The New Melting Pot.................................................. 68
Conclusion........................................................................... 75
Bibliography........................................................................... 77
Appendix (A)........................................................................... 80
INTRODUCTION

It was a normal Wednesday evening for the students of Georgetown University. The early February air whipped along the brick-laden buildings and attacked any unexposed skin as students and instructors alike headed towards The Tombs, a popular local hangout. Tuesday is “trivia night”, a tradition in which many partake. When one walks down the stairway and into the bar area, they are normally greeted by a buzz that can only be generated by a diverse group of young and old minds, alike, mixed with a fair amount of alcohol. While waiters and waitresses hustle through the crowd with pitchers of Coors Light and plates of pizza, burgers, and wings, the crowd is generally seated at large wood tables conversing at a volume to be expected in a middle school P.E. class. A warm place, many feel welcome to contribute to the buzz of this communal establishment. The crowd begins to hush as the subjects begin, “teams” hastily write their answers on small leaflets of paper as they brainstorm within a plethora of subject matter.

*How many times has the Capitol been refurbished? Which U.S. state has the highest percentage of obesity? Can you name four countries that start with ‘G’?* The questions continue, the answers are generally correct, and life “goes on”, as one might say. *How many accounts related to ISIS did Twitter just delete?* It’s just another question to the crowd of students, professors, and maybe a few passerby. These people generally have experienced many successes in their lives, they are in one of the wealthiest neighborhoods on the East Coast, they are more than likely to be attending the world-renowned University that is a mere block away from the bar, and they felt comfortable enough to feel included in said environment. The pencils begin to write down the number of what has now become public knowledge: 126,000 Accounts.
While merely a bar-trivia question, the context has been an issue of U.S. national security for quite some time (some may argue that the social media “boom” took place in late 2007 or early 2008). Radical Islamic organizations such as the Islamic State have been utilizing American social media platforms as a distributor of propaganda as well as a recruitment tool of world citizen… even inclusive towards citizens of the United States of America. One may wonder how this is accomplished. How can a citizen of the United States go against his own country to join forces with an organization that has sworn to murder all those who do not conform to an extreme hardline form of Islam? How can a U.S. citizen go against the values of a nation known for its attempts to assist in worldly virtue? The process goes deeper than what many could imagine. It is the goal of this thesis to discuss successful cases of radical jihadist recruitment of U.S. citizens both before and after the development of social media platforms. This piece seeks to create a timeline that includes groups such as Al Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Taiba (before the social media boom of late 2007/2008) all the way through examples of modern day recruitment (via social media platforms) performed by the Islamic State, while simultaneously seeking to find similarities and differences as well as subsequent impact of radical jihadist social media usage. Thusly my thesis statement is that with social media and the availability to utilize the ‘like button’ in particular, radical jihadist recruiting has become exponentially faster and more effective by creating an instantaneous and symbiotic relationship between recruiter and (American) recruit; thus tapping into the human desire for (instant) validation.

The approach to this research amounts to two different lenses: one that explores the technological and defensive stance of U.S. Defense personnel and one that is of a more intimate
nature in the examination of individual case studies and the appeal of jihadist recruitment of American citizens.

This piece uses both primary and secondary sources in concerns to the discussion of individual case studies. More specifically, I found individuals who were successfully recruited to join terror organizations and separated their experiences into a split timeline (both post 9/11) divided by the before and after development of social media platforms (which took place in approximately early 2008). Through the analysis of these citizen’s “stories”, the mission is to understand the methods of successful recruitment before the social media boom and the tactics that have had success after its utilization by jihadist terror groups (mainly through a scope surrounding the Islamic State). These “stories” have provided a personal and up-close description of where, when, and how terror groups have had success amongst U.S. citizens seeking to radicalize and act against the U.S. by way of acts of terror. This research has also assisted in identifying common traits that resound amongst these recruited individuals.

Due to the fact that this topic is indeterminately fluid in nature, the investigation surrounding this subject falls heavily upon interviews as a major source of information. Interviews with various U.S. Government/Military personnel have been documented from agents/operators of the U.S. Naval Special Warfare Program, Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the U.S. Army (again, due to the nature of security involved with these occupations, many of the personnel involved with this piece have requested pseudonyms or anonymity). These interviews seek the identification of popular and successful techniques of jihadist recruitment after 9/11 (before the birth of social media). This coupled with understanding the effects that domestic social media platforms have had on fundamentalist
Islamic recruitment of U.S. citizens and how the U.S. Government is now approaching the topic from a security standpoint. The interviews provide context pertaining to American reaction to this recruitment from the lens of national security from those who are on the front lines of fending off this threat. These interviews are meant to add an organic “boots on the ground” context that is unique to other academic pieces available for public usage.

After splitting the timeline of these case studies, this piece draws connections amongst these citizens turned terrorists against their home country. Additionally, I answer what methods of recruitment had positive yield before social media and compare this with which SM platforms appealed to those successfully recruited. Was there emotional appeal? A deeper connection felt in a private server email versus a Facebook message? What background experience does one need to have in order to be fully prepared to turn on his country? Further knowledge was gained from sources such as Abdel Atwan’s *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate* to provide continuous contextual matter from a technological standpoint as to what the world’s “premier” terror group is doing in order to yield a force of approximately 40,000 fundamentalists. Coupling this with individual case studies and human-interest articles from technologically savvy publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*, this research exposes the tactics of successful recruitment and those that have failed. Currently, Atwan’s piece remains as one of the only published books that addresses current recruiting processes performed by the Islamic State. This being said, media outlets such as *NPR, The New York Times*, etc. have covered the topic from a variety of academic standpoints. While there is very little academic material on the subject, what exists generally acknowledges the fact that radical jihadist recruitment is heavily dependent on social media. This
piece seeks to identify how radical jihadist recruitment (via social media) has become increasingly effective, particularly concerning the successful recruitment of American citizens.

Critical analysis of these individuals and the tactics meant to recruit them has generally exposed what they viewed their “American” identity to be as well as the push and pull factors that terror groups enacted to successfully get them to radicalize. By finding common connections, regardless of platform, this thesis seeks to contribute a better understanding of the profile of those recruited and to see if any similarities can be found in their individual journeys to join foreign terror cells. With the connections found, they will effectively answer the question of why as well as potentially hint towards the future of Islamic radical recruitment.

In a traditional thesis format, the first chapter focuses on the development of Islamic radicalism and its historical interaction with the United States (acts of terror, threats of attack, Islamophobia). The objective of this chapter is to identify Islamic extremism and to address its current relevance in American culture (political, social, etc.). The chapter will act as an introduction to my argument and will establish the analysis as a legitimate, non-biased argument. During this chapter, I address my sources (mainly interviewees) along with the security concerns involved with identifying them by pseudonym. The chapter starts with a small constructed timeline ranging from Thomas Jefferson’s interaction with the extremist (Muslim) Barbary Corsairs during the Barbary Wars all the way to the attacks of September 11th, leading into the creation of the Islamic State. By the end of this section, I address the creation of social media and identify key platforms that are now being used for recruitment in comparison to what was used prior to its creation (this would mean identifying terms such as “homegrown terrorist”, deep-web
applications, etc.). Essentially this chapter introduces my argument and the significance of Islamic radical recruitment within the United States.

The second chapter introduces the case studies that are analyzed for the reason that they occurred before the social media boom of 2008. These three cases (the “Paintball Gang”, Ehsanul Islam Sadequee and Syed Haris, and Russell Defreitas), are all examples of successful extremist recruitment of U.S. citizens by Lashkar-e-Taiba and Al Qaeda. This chapter is broken up into subsections that allow for each “backstory” to be discussed in detail. This sets the stage for the discussion of the “lone wolf” theme utilized by Al Qaeda and groups like it. By virtue of defining this theme in recruitment, one can better understand the idea of mass information distribution in the hopes of finding individuals willing to simply participate in violent acts of terror rather than “joining the team”, so to speak. This section maintains most of its evidence in articles from the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, and official government terror analysis websites.

The third chapter introduces the social media boom of 2008 and discusses its instant popularity across the world. I then discuss how this popularity encouraged a group such as the Islamic State to develop a recruitment strategy that is predominantly based within social media platforms. It is here that I introduce the cases of Moner Mohammad Abusalha, Usamaah Abdullah Rahim, and “Alex” (the pseudonym used by the New York Times for a woman recruited by ISIS). Just as I look to discuss the “lone wolf” concept in Chapter 2, this section explores the IS recruitment concept of the “young lion” and how the group encourages recruits to come and “join the family” of likeminded individuals. This chapter analyzes the case backstories and attempts to identify which social media platforms were the most effective as well as if a “personality to platform” concept can be proven.
In the fourth and final chapter, I discuss how recruitment strategy has changed from Al Qaeda’s mass distribution strategy (“lone wolf”) to the Islamic State’s more personalized social media strategy (“young lion”). The demographic of young, impressionable, and isolated individuals that have been targeted both pre and post social media boom will be addressed as a common thread. The case studies of these individuals all have similarities that are profound in terms of this thesis. These personalities have backstories that are complex in nature, but they prove that a certain type of U.S. citizen can be targeted and can be considered more susceptible to recruitment despite different location, technological capability, etc.

The concept of “instant validation” is discussed in terms of the impact of social media. Again speaking to the impressionable demographic that terror groups seek to recruit, this section discusses how social media has enhanced recruitment and radical themes. This has been accomplished by these groups having the ability to have instant access to individuals and the ability to constantly “reaffirm” their decision to join groups such as the Islamic State; this essentially being achieved through instant messaging, radical sermon distribution, etc. At the end of this chapter, I maintain the argument that discusses the fact that social media’s impact on jihadist recruitment has advanced extremist efforts in penetrating the American identity by virtue of recruiting its citizens and offering them a perceived “second chance” at life and a validation of life choices. I look to expose the irony in that American-based social media platforms have assisted in the recruitment of U.S. citizens for foreign terror programs. It is here that I ultimately tie my findings together to finally justify my original thesis statement. This piece seeks to contribute to academia in the sense that it draws from a pool of diverse contributors as well as the fact that it draws a split timeline that transcends over multiple terror groups. It is my hope
that the information within this document will inform and potentially assists those that seek to prevent and combat homegrown terrorism.

Chapter 1: Have We Seen this Before?

After the Revolutionary War, the new United States of America sought to establish itself as an independent, self-sufficient power. One of the most important factors in fostering international recognition of the U.S. lied in America’s ability to engage in global commerce. Transnational trade could only happen if the U.S. could maintain open maritime trade routes. The Mediterranean Sea, a particularly critical area for U.S. trade, also was unsafe because the U.S. lost British naval protection in 1783.\(^4\) And, while the U.S. political structure was in its infancy, it faced a new enemy across the Atlantic. This enemy did not wear a uniform; it was unified by its belief that scripture justified its actions. The Barbary Corsairs were pirates who attacked foreign merchant ships that entered the waters off of the (Islamic) Barbary States (then city-states:

Algiers, Tunis, Morocco, and Tripoli). The Corsairs believed that any ship, without an Islamic crew, that entered the nautical boundaries of the Barbary States was subject to capture. This was justified by their belief that the Koran validated the protection of any Muslim territory, no matter what the cost.

While originally a concept of self-defense, corruption would ultimately lead towards acts of aggression directed at foreign merchant ships. The pirates would then hold ship, crew, and bounty for ransom. In dealing with these pirates, the U.S. found itself facing a dual-task: to legitimize itself internally while simultaneously establishing security for its international interests. The American government had little choice but to pay the ransoms demanded by the Corsairs in return for safe passage. This being due to the fact that the U.S. Navy was not yet equipped to handle conflict at such great distance. Rulers of the Barbary States, most notably Yusef Karamanli, the Bashaw of Tripoli, collected the ransoms. In 1801, newly elected President Thomas Jefferson decided that naval intervention was necessary to deal with the Barbary States. This would prove to be the first time that U.S. leadership would ever face

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5 Sofka, 530.


7 Turner, 123.

8 Sofka, 532.

9 Turner, 123.

10 Turner, 122.
radical Islam in a foreign theatre. It is doubtful that anyone at the time would consider this form of extreme religious interpretation to take root in the United States.

While radical Islamic acts did not particularly take hold within the US until September 11, there was still an understanding of the occurrences taking place from an international lens. Ranging from the 1979 U.S. Embassy conflict in Iran, the 1983 Beirut Marine barracks bombing, through the Gulf War, U.S. citizens were aware of overseas events, but the vast majority considered them just that . . . overseas. With the forming of Al Qaeda and the Taliban in the late 80s through 1990, the hardline Islamic theme was finally recognized as a threat by the U.S. due to embassy bombings during the mid 90s. Still, many people did not consider these groups to be a considerable domestic danger. The same can be said for Lakshar-e-Taiba, or Army of the Pure as their attacks on Indian military personnel escalated through the 90s and into the early 2000s… this would all change in 2001.

Transitions from 9/11 and the Development of Islamophobia

Televisions in every bar, restaurant, hotel, airport, and household were tuned in to images of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Word was getting out that a passenger plane had been ran into the ground near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The entirety of the United States of America was in utter shock. Images of men and women jumping out of the Towers would become images still remembered today, burned into the minds of those that lived through that


day. Seeing all of this unfold, volunteer firefighters, paramedics, police, and civilians drove to downtown Manhattan from states, hours, even days away. News crews across the country commentated real-time as the South Tower was struck. The scene across the country was hand-over-mouth, bent at the knees, tears-streaming. Children were evacuated from school, businessmen and women were frantically calling their wives reassuring them of their safety, and the world watched as one of its superpowers was dealt a mighty blow.

American generations are often asked where were you when . . . Many could answer the details of their day leading up to the assassination of John F. Kennedy or when the United States first landed on the moon. For this generation of Americans, the event that most of our children will ask us about is where were you on September 11, 2001? 9/11 has such weight in the national identity of the United States and its people. It is both the point of utter despair yet simultaneously the pinnacle of redemption. The nation held its collective breath, held the hands of loved ones and citizen alike, and then began to rebuild. Peter Roff of U.S. News once wrote:

A compassionate, motivated, unique people, Americans take the worst of what the world has to offer and then some and then get right back up and move on with the business, not of life, but of exceptionalism. It is not just in triumph that we serve as the model for the world but in tragedy as well. As 9/11 recedes further and further into the mists of time, this is the lesson onto which we should hold: America acts differently from the rest of the world because we are different, so much the better for ourselves and for the rest of the world.¹³

Defined by resilience and recognized the world throughout for its collective reaction, the United States cleared the dust and debris and ultimately prepared for war.

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Former U.S. Navy SEAL operator, Lieutenant Rob Sarver remembers September 11 as the day that “changed everything”. There was something different about the United States and its citizens. “Generation X had Reagan and Columbine; not a whole lot of military action. 9/11 changed all of that”. The 2015 interview in which Sarver discussed this was echoed years prior by Wall Street Journal author, Peggy Noonan. Ms. Noonan discussed the events of September 11 years later in 2009 at what she only describes as “an eastern university”. She conversed with students in hopes to discover the impact that the day had on them. After all, they are the future of the nation. Noonan writes:

They’ve been marked by 9/11 more than they know. It was their first moment of historical consciousness. Before that day, they didn’t know what history was; after that day, they knew they were in it. It was a life-splitting event. Before it they were carefree, after they were careful. A 20-year-old junior told me that after 9/11, “a backpack on a subway was no longer a backpack,” and a crowded theater was “a source for concern.” Every one of them used the word “bubble”: the protected bubble of their childhood “popped.” And all of them said they spent 9/11 and the days after glued to the television, watching over and over again the footage—the north tower being hit by the plane, the fireball. The video of 9/11 has firmly and ineradicably entered their brains. Which is to say their first visual memory of America, or their first media memory, was of its towers falling down.

In the last sentence of the above excerpt, Noonan brings something to the table that will be of tremendous significance throughout the remainder of this document: the concept of the *media memory*.

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In the wake of 9/11 there was a parallel evolution displayed in not only wariness for the country’s safety but also a significant growth in patriotism. The concepts of “citizen, patriot, neighbor” all gained strength as the country, seemingly as a whole, gathered around its wounded. The loyalty, trust, and patriotism that erupted from the country was awe-inspiring. Never again seemed to be the sentiment. Never again seemed to mean a lot to Americans for a period of time afterwards. People went back to work after the events with a different attitude. This was a time for not only international war, but also for domestic caution . . . somewhat comparable to the sentiments during what many refer to the resentment and caution towards Soviets (both foreign and domestic), known as “the Red Scare” during the Cold War. This new scare would dawn a new name: Islamophobia. Professor Peter Gottschalk, a professor of religion at Wesleyan University remarks on the original definition of Islamophobia that appeared in a report in the early 90s in its infantile stage. Gottschalk comments that Islamophobia “helps to describe a whole spectrum of behavior and attitudes that have existed a long time but haven’t had a name before. Like other prejudices, Islamophobia is a learned fear, one instilled by society.”¹⁶ This relatively new sentiment would become increasingly apparent through the early to mid 2000s. Stories such as “Airport Screenings for ‘Flying While Muslim’” became commonplace on major news outlets.¹⁷ These stories were discussion of how Muslims or even Middle Easterners were paid “special attention to” at TSA checkpoints. Overall, there was a general fear not of the


religion itself, but of those who could interpret its teachings in a radical manner and ultimately perform violent acts under personal justification of religious understanding. People became increasingly anxious as there was a sharp uptick in anonymous reporting of potential terrorist actors on every form of public transportation as well as almost any public spectrum.

**The Growth of Radical Jihad and Al Qaeda**

While the fear of (radical) Muslims swelled within the US and allied countries, a storm was brewing in the form of the two foreign theatres of war: Iraq and Afghanistan. Much of like what the US was experiencing in terms of Islamophobia, a similar hatred and distaste was brewing in these war-struck regions. Abdel Bari Atwan, a mainstay journalist in understanding jihadist radical groups, and author of such pieces as *The Secret History of al-Qaida* and *Islamic State: Digital Caliphate* has had up close and personal dealings with these groups. In terms of understanding the sentiment of those who disliked the US, Atwan is most equipped, having interviewed Osama Bin Laden twice during the mid-90s. But during this new war, there was something different.

In terms of public relations in Iraq, the Americans were their own worst enemy. Partly because of the US President’s rhetoric, many Muslims, and not necessarily extremists, saw what was happening in religious terms: the Christian ‘Crusaders’ invading Muslim lands. The conventional war lasted less than six weeks. There was little resistance as tons of explosives, cluster bombs, and even napalm laid waste to Baghdad, Basra, Kirkuk, and Mosul. American television sanitized its broadcasts, emphasizing the political narrative whereby the despotic Saddam was being replaced by democracy and freedom, and ignoring the blood and guts reality of the ‘Shock and Awe’ bombardment. Modest
estimates put Iraqi civilian deaths at around 7,400 with 45,000 Iraqi soldiers killed or injured. American casualties were just 141.18

In mid-2003, the scandal of Abu Ghraib made itself known. The US-run prison facility had tortured and humiliated Iraqi prisoners so inhumanely that the images went viral on a world-spectrum.19 With the ousting of Saddam Hussein complete (his capture would come later that year), the US attempted to grow democracy from the ground which they obliterated mere months prior.

By virtue of channeling the confusion and subsequent hatred of America on behalf of Iraqis, a mass sum of Middle Easterners, as well as Muslims, Osama Bin Laden began calling for suicide bombers as early as April of 2003, quoted as saying in a worldwide address: “If you start suicide attacks, you will see the fear of the Americans all over the world”.20 Complete with Bin Laden’s discussion, was the unification of nearly all of the Islamist groups within Iraq, going by the coalition name of Jaish Ansar al-Sunna (JAS) or (Army of the Followers of the Teachings). According to Atwan, these groups proclaimed the foundational ideology that demanded an Islamic State in Iraq.21 The brainchild for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) was formed.

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19 Ibid., 37.

20 Ibid., 40.

21 Ibid., 41.
Coupled with Osama’s tactical rhetoric was the ruthless leader of Islamist group al-Tawhid wal Jihad and future premier emir of Iraq’s Al Qaeda, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Atwan discusses Zarqawi’s biggest “donation” to the cause as Al Qaeda attempted to move away from mainstream media in starting its own online news service “The Voice of the Caliphate” in 2005.

With 9/11 in the rearview, there was not an abundance of successful attacks on US soil at this point. News outlets such as Al Jazeera would constantly stream Bin Laden’s videos in their reporting, but this was not sufficient enough to spread the message. This was where Zarqawi helped jihadist action go viral; combined with one of the first forms of what the world began to know as “social media.”

Zarqawi pioneered the tactic of recording every successful attack on Coalition targets in Iraq on digital video, complete with cries of ‘Allahu Akbar’ (‘God is Great’) and a soundtrack of the rather beautiful, stirring Nasheeds. (These Islamic hymns are specifically written for the purpose of praise, adoration or prayer, and are typically addressed to a deity or to a prominent figure.) YouTube, which was launched in 2005, provided the perfect forum for these videos, as well as for the filmed posthumous ‘wills and testaments’ of suicide bombers, which could be uploaded anonymously.

The production of YouTube was a key turning point in not only American pop-culture and technology, but it would develop into a worldwide phenomenon. Men, women, and children now had instant access to user generated content ranging from cooking videos to celebrity interviews, to real-time scenes across the world. YouTube’s ability to provide not just fantastic (maybe

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22 Ibid.

23 Atwan, 10.

24 Viral in this case will be defined as an item of mass, worldwide acknowledgment regardless of positive or negative appeal.

25 Atwan, 11.
unrealistic) pictures, but of real-life transactions, thusly made it a potential advancement in the dissemination of content for the good, the bad, and the ugly.

The Islamic State on the Rise

With the May 2, 2011 killing of Osama Bin Laden by operators of DEVGRU (United States Naval Special Warfare Development Group or “SEAL Team 6”), Al Qaeda suffered a significant loss in not only popularity, but also overall effectiveness. The United States began to ruthlessly pursue Al Qaeda leaders in subsequent weeks leading to a scene of outright confusion and disorganization within the group. While the killing of Bin Laden took place in Pakistan, there was yet another event of significance taking place around the Middle East; the fight for reform.

The Arab Spring took its momentum across the board in countries ranging from Egypt to Tunisia and for the purposes of this piece, most importantly Syria. This being the most significant state due to the fact that it represents the outright struggle to oust the government headed by the cruel President Bashar al-Assad. Thousands of people protested against a man who would once torture suspected non-supporters, who would utilize chemical agents upon his own people, and who would not support any form of allied action against radical jihadists in the Middle East. Assad sent Syrian military into the streets to use deadly force, only to ultimately escalate the problem. While the transfer of Syria to IS control will be addressed below, it is significant to recognize the number of people within the state that the conflict has affected. It is

estimated that over 55,000 people were killed in the SyrianCivil War in 2015 alone.\textsuperscript{27} While numbers vary, rough estimates believe that anywhere between 250-300,000 Syrians have been killed as a result of the conflict.\textsuperscript{28}

With Bin Laden gone and an utterly decentralized Al Qaeda, there was a push for a new leader. One who could be a strong reflection of hardline values but also be full fledged in his commitment towards the idea of a united Caliphate. This would not be the case in terms of Ayman al-Zawahiri, who became Bin Laden’s replacement in August of 2011.\textsuperscript{29} Distrusted by many within the group, he was considered harsh in some areas and lost within certain aspects of his faith. This election plays a very important role in the consequent development of ISIS, as Zawahiri’s Al Qaeda would find itself questioned by a jihadist group coalition.

Enter Abu Bakir al-Baghdadi, the emir at large of ISI. Baghdadi, committed to establishing a hold in the porous Syrian region, sought to institute his group within Syrian territory. The group would be come known as Jahbat al-Nusra, established in January of 2012.\textsuperscript{30} With the Syrian civil war in full swing, al-Nusra became a premier fighting force and would prove dominant in the field of battle. Witnessing this success, Baghdadi merged ISI and al-Nusra in 2013 under the name of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham.\textsuperscript{31} There was an issue with this

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{29} Atwan, 66.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 67.
\end{footnotesize}
merger as Al Qaeda was not as particularly involved in Syria and rather sought to focus on Iraq as its priority. Therefore when senior al-Nusra leader, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani pledged his allegiance to the (relatively) newly elected Zawahiri, a split occurred between IS and al-Nusra. With Zawahiri promoting jihadist fighters transferring themselves to Iraq, more conflict emerged as many had either been fighting for their homeland in Syria or had travelled there in hopes of making “change”. Many had immersed themselves in the effort and truly supported the hardline and fanatical rhetoric used by Baghdadi.\(^{32}\) Most ultimately decided to stay and fight; they were winning. It was a combination of their efforts and Baghdadi’s unrelenting pursuit of establishing the Caliphate that he was able to claim himself as the head caliph and emir in July of 2014. ISIS was born and now it had a face.\(^{33}\)

**The Parameters of *Never Again***

“Never again” seemed to be a saying of not just anger, but hope on behalf of the United States. “Never again” implies that U.S. citizen and government would not stand by idle as the country was attacked and betrayed. The sentiment of these two words appeared to give people hope, faith, and conviction. In the wake of 9/11, everyone appeared to be on board with this concept of not only prevention, but patriotism. While this sentiment appears to have dulled somewhat with time and the short-term memory of the average person, the lessons learned and the thoughts that the event provoked still live on today. It is this sentiment that shocks many when they learn about homegrown violent jihad. It is this sentiment that horrifies people when

\(^{32}\) Ibid.

\(^{33}\) Atwan, 104.
they hear the stories of individuals such as Russell Defreitas or Moner Abusalha. The plots to blow up airport fuel pipelines or to radicalize to be a suicide bomber seem to be impossible goals for Americans. Americans who learn as children to say the Pledge of Allegiance in school, who sing the National Anthem before every major public event, these are the same Americans that seek to kill innocents in the name of Islam? Who these people were is what matters. Understanding who they were and how they were before these actions contribute to truly comprehending the individual and their situation. They go under the umbrella title of “homegrown jihadist”. They are defined as American citizens that are successfully recruited and radicalized by hardline Islamic extremist groups. But is that the whole story?

The question that many want the answer to first is why? Why would someone turn their back on their own country (regardless of whether or not they were Muslim to begin with) and attempt to harm their neighbor? While a reasonable first question, in the case of homegrown jihadists, the best way to answer why may actually come in the form of how they became a recruit for this deadly worldwide movement. By understanding how the United States may be able to redefine the parameters of never again for the better.

**Recruitment Tools: The Way it is and the Way it Used to be (Al Qaeda)**

Al Qaeda presents a very interesting contradiction within the lines of ideology and recruitment strategy. A traditional, hardline group that once prided itself on its independence away from modern technology, it found itself being forced to evolve in a forever technologically
progressive world. While the Taliban held on to their extremely conservative lifestyle to all aspects of life, technology not excluded, Al Qaeda made some impressive strokes in gaining traction within the realms of encrypted communications and emails in approximately 1995 and had its own website by the year 2000. By 2003, Al Qaeda’s ‘Thirty-nine Principles of Jihad’ listed ‘cyber jihad’ as a primary form. It was in these progressive movements that the group was able to achieve somewhat of a limited touch point for those that wanted access to information. This being said, the occurrence of 9/11 brought about harsh monitoring and vicious repercussions on behalf of the U.S. Government if one were to be caught accessing said information.

In the wake of September 11, the first and most important aspect to understand about the recruitment strategies performed by Al Qaeda lies in the fact that there was a direct war going on in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many often forget that it is very difficult to recruit individuals for a movement and simultaneously engage in a firefight in one’s backyard. In order to best understand Al Qaeda’s forms of recruitment, it must be recognized where the information is not only most popular, but is being disseminated at whatever volume made itself available given the wartime situation. (SEAL) Lt. Rob Sarver witnessed firsthand aspects of what can be termed as “organic recruitment”, or face-to-face interaction upon which the spread of radicalization was

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34 Atwan, 10.

35 Atwan, 10.

36 Ibid.
encouraged. Having deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan on seven total tours, Sarver witnessed first hand the recruitment pattern from its origins:

In Afghanistan, these guys (recruits/recruiters) are trained by a religious imam who teaches a radical version of jihad in somewhere like Pakistan. The imam preaches what is known as the unspoken (sixth) pillar of Islam. The sixth pillar essentially states that all religions, (they preach especially Christianity), will be removed from the Muslim world and all that remains are the truly faithful. They come across the border unarmed and in doing so, U.S. military personnel (myself included) could not touch them [engage in combat]. In Helmand province (Afghanistan) they would follow the river valley, arm themselves, and continue up the valley and go anywhere in the country that they wanted. That was a recruitment problem we [SEAL Team 3] saw there. They were pretty much uneducated, fighting age (13 and up) males, and there wasn’t anything we could do to them.

In Iraq, there was much of the same. They would come in through Syria and follow the wadi system [essentially a drainage system for villages]. They would stop in cities such as Fallujah and Ramadi, then straight into Baghdad. The governments of each state wouldn’t let us into the Mosques where these guys were being educated. We [SEAL Team 3 and coalition forces] knew that was where they were recruiting and disseminating information but we could not do anything. We dealt with the imam, who taught a very skewed version of the Koran. What went against us was the disbanding of the Iraqi Army…those guys went home and sold their guns. Al Qaeda went in and said if you kill Americans, we will pay you. A lot of those guys were ex-Iraqi military and who were ultimately scattered by the conflict. Money proved to be a tremendous factor for those who chose to fight against us. 37

Accompanying Sarver on multiple tours of duty was personnel ranging from Air Force to Army. One such Army personnel (name, position, and rank redacted), commented that key to the movements was the ability to use cellphones, a surprising twist for traditionalist Al Qaeda as well as for village-to-village usage. 38

37 Rob Sarver, interview by author, Dallas, October 30, 2015.

38 Interview with a member of the U.S. Army, phone interview by author, October 30, 2015
I have never seen better OPSEC (Operation(s)(al) Security) with regard to the utilization of cellphones than in Iraq and Afghanistan. The large proliferation of cellphones was astounding. I was beyond impressed about how these individuals understood that we (coalition forces) could track them down. Their communications and recruitment were unbelievably advance from a security sense. Their comms (communications) were always coded, sequenced, and formatted. To this day I have no idea what they were talking about. When you catch them and ask them; they have no formal education whatsoever. These guys would talk in a code that I don’t think our best (U.S. Intelligence Operators) could crack. “Dragons, fire, small rocks, big rocks, etc.”. They would literally use words like that. I had no idea what that was. It ended up translating to exact coordinates, positioning, etc. that went far past recruitment or rhetoric and into actual tactical planning. Their ability to speak securely was huge for their sense of network.39

The concept of comfort within (secure) network extended itself into the recruiting pool worldwide. Al Qaeda began to breed a sense of superior technological capability when it came to encrypted messaging and mobile communications. Yet there was still much left to be desired.

The space that was desired would be directly addressed by Anwar al-Awlaki, an American born imam at Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Center in Falls Church, Virginia.40 In the wake of September 11, al-Awlaki was visited by news crews from around the United States. In fact, he appeared as “impressive” to New York Times writer Laurie Goldstein in an October 19, 2001 article. Goldstein stated that al-Awlaki was a Muslim leader “that could unify both the East and the West”.41 He was also described as someone who was very amicable and influential in the community in a later New York Times article: “Young people, turned off by older imams who spoke English with heavy accents and knew little about American ways, found Awlaki

39 Ibid.


approachable. ‘’He lit up when he was with the youth,” Jamal Ali, 40, an airport driver who prayed at the San Diego mosque . . .”\textsuperscript{42} With the gift of sociability and respect within the Muslim community, al-Awlaki began to better understand how well his younger followers were interacting with developing platforms such as YouTube. He encouraged Al Qaeda to create its own YouTube channel upon leaving the U.S. (his departure due to the fact that he was under investigation for soliciting prostitutes).\textsuperscript{43} YouTube appeared as its first solid social media platform for recruitment and information distribution. Along with Al Qaeda’s own YouTube page was Awlaki’s. Due to mass support from the Islamic radicalist world, his sermons were put online and can still be accessed in the modern day. Awlaki was ultimately killed at the hands of a U.S. Airstrike in Yemen (2011).\textsuperscript{44} Although the ‘bin Laden of the internet’ had been terminated at the hands of the country that he turned against, his legacy within the radical Islamic community is still revered today. Evolving from encrypted emails to major social media platforms, Al Qaeda had entered the recruiting scene.

\textbf{The Onset of Islamic State Recruitment}

In terms of splitting the timeline concerning my case studies, it is at this point that I must address the technological abilities of the developing Islamic State. IS is almost entirely dependent on modern technology for recruitment purposes. In acknowledging that this group is

\textsuperscript{42} Shane, “The Lessons of Anwar Al-Awlaki”.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} Atwan, 135.
relatively new in its existence, one must presume that recruitment tactics carried on from Al Qaeda through to al-Nusra and ultimately unto the head leaders and strategists of ISIS. Many believe that without the digital technology that IS harnessed, its existence would not have come to fruition in the first place. At its most superficial breakdown, Atwan describes its recruitment tactics and platform manipulation:

Islamic State’s recruitment machine is largely online . . . In Islamic countries, initial approaches were more often made via an intermediary or recruiter, but in the West, most said that they had either direct messaged someone via Twitter or Facebook, or had been contacted by a friend, relative, or acquaintance already inside Islamic State, to initiate their own ‘migration’ and to receive practical advice and logistical instructions. After the initial contact has been made, anonymous smart phone instant messaging platforms such as Kik and WhatsApp are used to deepen the contact.

Atwan and others like him have discussed in detail the fact that radical groups have never had the ability to have almost instant access to those who seek information. Labeling modern electronics, communications platforms, and especially social media, they can be drawn as parallel to one’s modern, “natural environment”. In recognizing this, their effectiveness and successes with recruiting not just U.S. citizens, but on a worldwide spectrum has been rapid. Governments around the world are scrambling to be one step ahead of these online recruiters with some success.

One such U.S. Government-contracted company is Palantir technologies, a private software and securities company that analyzes data, programming, firewalling, etc. Only drawing from the best of the best recruits within their prospective applicant pool, the company has offices

45 Atwan, 135.

46 Ibid., 18.

47 Atwan, 10.
around the continental United States. The Washington DC office comes equipped with everything a young professional could need for a comfortable workspace with amenities ranging from a “nap-room” to a catering service. Employees wiz around the sophisticated and technologically advanced office space on “Razor” scooters to access opposite sides of the office in the most expedited manner. It may sound like a scene out of a movie, something unrealistic and unnecessary, but when one catches wind of the average employees fourteen-to-sixteen-to-eighteen hour days; it makes sense.

John Doyle, a former operator with the U.S. Army Special Forces and current leader of social media analysis programming at Palantir, is at the forefront of what the Islamic State offers distinct factors in terms of recruitment. Doyle speaks to the fact that IS currently has an estimated war chest of $500 million to $1 billion U.S. dollars, (now since deleted) 126,000 related Twitter accounts, as well as an endless supply of access to potential new methods of programming and app usage. Due to the fact that such accounts were monitored (and now deleted by Twitter), the Islamic State turns to apps such as Skype, WhatsApp, Kik, that allow for untraceable international communication.

In addition to the development of various apps, ISIS has turned to a multi-faceted approach that extends even outside of social media. In attempts to reach a younger crowd, the group has gone as far to develop a video game titled Salil al-Sawarem (“Clashing of the Swords”). In this game, users have a first person view in what appears to be war-time in the Middle East (Atwan suggests northern Iraq). The basic goal of the game is to kill as many

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49 Atwan, 13.
American personnel as possible. Options to use rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), AK-47 assault rifles, and even military-grade knives for use to exterminate American “soldiers” are made available. The soldiers in the game are dressed as modern day Special Forces operators. Islamic hymns play in the background behind the sounds of automatic machine gun fire and radio operators speaking in Arabic. Every time the user kills an American soldier a set of dog tags appears on the screen seemingly to imply that the user has taken not only a life, but an identity as well.

While further breakdown and understanding of IS recruitment will be discussed later in this piece, there are a few definitive aspects that can be extracted at face value: social media platforms, smartphone technology, generational technological acknowledgement, and severe punishments (in the forms of beheadings, burnings, crucifixion, etc.) distributed as propaganda.

Chapter 2: The Call of the Lone Wolf
“They were looking for rebels, the lone wolf that will do anything under the justification that it is Allah’s will”\textsuperscript{50} “Al Qaeda’s hallmark was always the \textit{lone wolf}, this idea that you needed to act out and kill as many people as possible to be effective and contribute towards the cause.”\textsuperscript{51} The answers were synonymous amongst personnel ranging from the Army, Navy, to any anti-terror analyst. Al Qaeda wants \textit{damage} at any time, anywhere, anything that can be justified as an action against non-believers in the name of Allah. In a September 2015 audio statement, Al Qaeda leader Zawahiri reflects the same of what former leader bin Laden had requested of his followers. “I call on all Muslims who can harm the countries of the crusader coalition not to hesitate. We must now focus on moving the war to the heart of the homes and cities of the crusader West and specifically America”.\textsuperscript{52} This was echoed by recent (now released) Guantanamo Bay detainee Ibrahim al-Qosi, who after release from Guantanamo (he was incarcerated as Osama Bin Laden’s premier accountant) became a spokesperson for Al Qaeda, Qosi states:

As [the mujahedeen] have placed the U.S. at the top of their list, the U.S. has placed them at the top of its list. And as the U.S. has waged war on us remotely as a solution to minimize its casualties, we have fought it remotely, as well by individual jihad. And as the U.S. has killed our men, we have killed its people — but it is not the same. Our dead are in heaven and theirs are in the hellfire.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{50} Interview with a member of the U.S. Navy, phone interview by author, October 30, 2015.

\textsuperscript{51} Doyle, interview.

\textsuperscript{52} Sam Frizell, "Al-Qaeda Leader Calls For Lone-Wolf Attacks on American Homes," \textit{Time}, September 14, 2015, \url{http://time.com/4033210/al-qaeda-leader-calls-for-lone-wolf-attacks-on-american-homes/}.

These quotes all contain the same rhetoric that was meant to inspire those wanting to make jihad. Bin Laden had always supported those willing to make jihad and guaranteed them life eternal in paradise (in his interpretation of the Quran).

But in order to have statements such as these take effect, there must be a method of information dissemination and potential further recruitment. In 2006, The Rand Corporation’s National Security Research Division asked expert analysts Scott Gerwehr and Sara Daly to look into recruitment tactics deployed by Al Qaeda. Their findings yielded a variety of methods with titles related to shapes, which they describe as “a combination of overall pattern and specific descriptors”. By analyzing a variety of variables that revolve around recruitment factors, they were able to generalize these tactics into one concise document. Such variables considered were public versus private forums, proximate versus mediate contact, private and mediated, etc. Although this document was created in 2006, its applicability to not only Al Qaeda’s but Laskar-e-Taiba’s recruitment strategies still remains. Gerwehr and Daly’s research will serve as a guiding line throughout the case studies within this chapter. In order to best breakdown each case study, thorough background will be provided of each case then analysis will subsequently

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55 Gerwehr and Daly, 81-83.

56 It must be kept in mind that there is no exact, definitive definition for situational recruitments. While analysts may offer up certain terminology there is no official title for many aspects of recruitment. It should also be acknowledged that Gerwehr and Daly’s research is not exclusive to the recruitment process of United States citizens, yet its relevance remains.

xxix
follow before moving on to the next recruitment event. This piece is designed as such to lend the reader room for analytical breakdown of information.

The Virginia Jihad Network (The “Paintball Gang”) (2001)

The movement in the woods would have startled any passerby that would make it so deep into the Virginia backcountry. 11 men moving in formation, attempting to perfect their movements and fine-tune the tactics learned from one another. Their weapons at the ready, one would assume that these men were of military profession or private security contractors working on their technique. But upon closer inspection, these men are not the expected. Some, in fact, are (former) military men, but the weapons they carry do not shoot bullets. Paintball guns as their training tool, they conduct various maneuvers and motions that appear eerily similar to tactics used by military personnel. That’s because they were military tactics.

One of the most active individuals in conducting this training was Seifullah Chapman, a former U.S. Marine. Officially born in 1972 as Randall Blue Chapman [Appendix A-1], he joined the military after high school but was discharged after he discovered that he had diabetes. Not much is known about Chapman in terms of his conversion to Islam (it is assumed that he was Christian as a young adult). The same lack of information is applicable to his basic

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background as he was out of country quite often. It is known that Chapman travelled to Saudi Arabia for religious reasons but also studied at Uum al-Qura University for six months in 1998.

Hammad Abdur-Raheem [Appendix A-2] was another influential member of the group. Born in 1968, his original name was Allen Walter Lyon. Raised in the Maryland area, he joined the Army upon graduating from high school. Having been Christian all of his life, many found it odd when he became increasingly interested in Islam as a young adult.\(^59\) He would go overseas to fight in Chechnya in the early 90s but came back to Virginia to attend community college.\(^60\) Abdur-Raheem would ultimately solidify himself alongside Chapman as a leader amongst the group of “paintball players”.

The men with the paintball guns were not innocent civilians. Their motions and maneuvers were not to better themselves at “paintball games”, rather for a different cause. These men composed the “Virginia Jihad Network” (a reference to the case name), a group of American and foreign citizens set on carrying out jihad. The paintball activity performed by this group is best described by Chris Heffelfinger in his piece *Radical Islam in America: Salafism’s Journey from Arabia to the West*:

Over the course of a three-year period leading up to the investigation and their arrests, members of the group played paintball together in order to practice small-unit military tactics, inspired by the idea of becoming mujahidin on a real battlefield, and also repeatedly expressed in their desire to dis as martyrs in jihad. The paintball training had started in mid-summer 2000 and lasted until September 11, 2001. A fellow Muslim who was not prosecuted in the case had attended the Dar al-Arqam and participated in the paintball activities with the group, and provided the property where they could play paintball games in rural Virginia. At one point in training, Hammad Abdur-Raheem and

\(^{59}\) Heffelfinger, 103.

\(^{60}\) Ibid.

xxxi
Seifullah Chapman established themselves among the group as the paintball “emirs” due to their prior military experience. At certain points in the training, trustworthy members were permitted to shoot live ammunition at a firing range. They also had overnight excursions, where they made encampments in preparation for a time when they might need to fight the government if Muslims were put in government-sponsored holding camps and mosques were shut down.61

The group and its leadership believed firmly that these paintball practice sessions, along with various forms of “intel” meetings would prove themselves worthy of a cause such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, otherwise known as “The Army of the Pure”.62 Much like Al Qaeda, “LT” was originally a regional radical program that developed a lengthy reach and an international presence among world security experts. In November of 1999, radical emir Hafiz Muhammad Saeed released a message that undoubtedly reached the “Paintball Gang”.63 His message was one of radical interpretation and meant to be general enough to be applicable to multiple theatres of potential jihadist action:

As the Prophet (Pbuh) said that Allah has placed his sustenance under the shadow of his sword. If Jihad is abolished, the infidels would snatch on us the same way a hungry person snatches on food. The mujahideen of Lashkar-e-Taiba have continued the Jihad despite of all the negative propaganda against them . . . Today, people, more then ever, are prepared for Jihad. They are not afraid of any constraints. If India can brutally invade Kashmir then why can't the mujahideen confront her there. The Jihad is not about Kashmir only. It encompasses all of India including Junagarh, Mavadar, and Hyderabad, etc. . . .

About 15 years ago, people might have found it ridiculous if someone had told them about the disintegration of the U.S.S.R. Today, I announce the break-up of India, insha-

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61 Heffelfinger, 104.


63 Ibid.
Allah. We will not stop until the whole India is dissolved into Pakistan… May Allah bestow martyrdom on us and enter us into the higher ranks of Paradise by His mercy.64

With the words of the radical imam as a driving force, the Paintball Gang would ultimately attempt to go overseas to train with the Army of the Pure. In multiple cases, they were successful in doing so. The men sought to further their education in paramilitary training in order to hopefully enact said training within the United States. The Paintball Gang tampered with passports, travel information, as well as purchased munitions for assault rifles. Chapman and Abdur-Raheem were identified as some of the more influential leaders of the gang.

Analysis of The “Paintball Gang”

In order to understand a relatively mass amount of U.S. recruits (when most U.S. citizens radicalize it is usually on a singular or small-multiple basis), one must draw a parallel to their location. This meaning that these individuals must have had relatively similar and equal access to a given source of recruitment in order for all of them to have been successfully engaged in the idea of carrying out jihad. A key point of discussion is where these men attended religious services. As Lt. Sarver discussed, mosques had the potential to be led by radical imams in Iraq and Afghanistan.65 These imams had an impact that extended past daily sermons in the lives of their followers. One’s imam can essentially dictate the level of interpretation of scripture and daily practice. While significantly less likely to have a radical imam leading a congregation within the United States, the name Dar al-Arqam should resonate.

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64 Ibid.
65 Sarver, interview.
[In discussion of the “Gang”]…The group’s focal point was the Dar al-Arqam, also known as the Center for Islamic Information and Education, located in the same office complex as the prominent Saudi-based groups, the Muslim World League and International Islamic Relief Organization at 360 S. Washington St. in Falls Church, Virginia. The center was founded by al-Timimi and others in 1999, in order to provide English language instruction on Islam to Western Muslims. It became apparent, however that the center had other educational objectives in mind.66

The area of Falls Church, Virginia may sound familiar due to the fact that it was mentioned in the discussion of not only the case study of the “Paintball Gang” but because it was also home to the future ‘Bin Laden of the Internet’, radical imam, Anwar al-Awlaki [Appendix A-3]. In doing further research upon Awlaki’s trajectory from his birthplace in New Mexico to considering leading a congregation in Virginia, it turns out that he was hired by Dar Al-Hijrah for a very ironic reason:

Later the mosque (Dar Al-Hjrah) would have to fend off hyperventilating accusations of guilt by association with terrorists (post 9/11) . . . Given that subsequent history, the motive of Dar Al-Hijrah leaders when they offered Awlaki a job as imam at the end of 2000 was more than a little ironic: they hired him specifically because they were worried about the dangers of radicalization. They feared the Dar Al-Hijrah, in suburban Falls Church, Virginia, was losing young people to a nearby, more overtly militant storefront mosque, one whose underground feel was underscored by its name: Dar al Arqam, for the owner of the safe house in Mecca where the Prophet Muhammad and his earliest followers met in secret. “The mosque’s objective in hiring Anwar was, they had had a series of imams who did not speak English and were not engaged with the youth,” said Johari Abdul Malik, a longtime Muslim chaplain at Howard University who became direct of outreach for Dar Al-Hijrah in 2002. At Dar al Aqrqam, a charismatic bioscienist named Ali al-Timimi was drawing young people with a hard line: that voting was haram —forbidden by Islamic law—because it elevated man’s law over God’s law, and that serving in the American military was outlawed because U.S. force might fight against Muslims.67

66 Heffelfinger, 106.

67 Heffelfinger, 107.
With Dar al Arqam now known as a hotspot of recruitment, the question of how comes to the fray. Most applicable to this situation was the “net” pattern [Appendix B-1], described as a large audience that is considered homogenous in nature. Because the audience is considered to be homogenous, a general “pitch” (hardline recruitment values) can be given to everyone. While the audience may act either adversely or positively, no one will speak out against the message. Therefore, it is easy to see how the “Paintball Gang” continuously received reinforcement in rhetoric and values as they prepared to carry out jihad. The values that were being repeated by Timimi most definitely strengthened the idea that the men needed to prepare for a war conducted by the United States on its own citizens who were Muslim: they just needed to be the country to the punch.

According to the Rand Security Division, the most prominent of variables associated with the net pattern are geography as well as demographic-psychographic similarities and contrasts among the targeted audience. While all 11 men were not analyzed, the two most influential leaders of military background (Chapman and Abdur-Raheem) had very similar trajectories. With Chapman being dropped from the military for his health and Abdur-Raheem rejoining to go fight in Chechnya after a brief stint with the Army, one could suggest that both of these individuals may not have had satisfactory careers within the military. Acknowledging this, one could also hypothesize that the constant hardline sermons delivered by radical Tamimi may have directly appealed to their state of youthful purpose when they first joined the Armed Forces.

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68 Gerwehr and Daly, 76.
69 Gerwehr and Daly, 76-77.
Ahmed and Sadequee (2005)

Syed Haris Ahmed had a gift in mathematics as reflected by his acceptance into Georgia Tech’s Engineering Program. The Pakistani-born 24, year old was on a trajectory for success. According to FBI records, Syed moved to the United States when he was 12 years old. The son of a “conservative” Muslim family, he was just like any other American teenager. Possibly an outlier due to his Pakistani heritage in a predominantly American-Southern city, he did not reveal any violent tendencies or ill wishes to those around him. It wasn’t until he met Ehsanul Islam Sadequee, a Virginia native working in Atlanta for a non-profit organization, that he found not only a new friend, but a new obsession: the call to “violent jihad”. Sadequee, originally born in Bangladesh, lived at home with his mother and siblings [Appendix A-4].

The two friends began to develop a fascination with the idea of Islamic fanaticism. With a lust for information, the two began to research various forms of jihad and jihadist groups. With the usage of online research and communication the two began to make strides in identifying potential groups with members in the United States as well as abroad in attempts to generate a dialogue. Official court documents provide context:

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72 FBI, “The Jihadists of Georgia, Part 1.”
The defendants developed and maintained contact with each other and with other supporters of violent jihad who were located in the United States and in foreign nations.

The defendants used multiple email addresses, coded language, and encrypted materials; attempted to detect and evade surveillance; made false statements to federal agents; and otherwise used various means and methods to conceal their communications, activities, and plans from detection, understanding, and disruption by government authorities in the United States and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{73}

Ahmed and Sadequee were making strides in their research. With their interest peaking, the two decided to research various paramilitary tactics.\textsuperscript{74} After obtaining information regarding these tactics, they would frequent areas in rural Northern Georgia to practice said tactics with non-lethal weapons in the form of paintball guns. With this knowledge and practice, the two opted to reach out to terror operatives in March of 2005.\textsuperscript{75} The meeting would take place in Toronto, Canada; three extremists made themselves available . . . one of them an alleged member of “Toronto 18” terror group (a group later associated with the bombing of Canadian Parliament in 2006).\textsuperscript{76}

While the exact information passed from the meeting has not been exposed, there are indications that Ahmed and Sadequee were instructed on how to conduct surveillance on targets for potential attacks. A FBI write-up continues:

\textsuperscript{73} United States v. Syed Haris Ahmed and Ehsanul Islam Sadequee, 1:06-cr-147, (ND GA. 2006).

\textsuperscript{74} FBI, "The Jihadists of Georgia, Part 1."

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
In April 2005, Ahmed and Sadequee drove a pickup truck to the nation’s capital and cased a series of landmarks—including the U.S. Capitol and the Pentagon—making more than 60 short video clips to help establish their extremist credentials. Sadequee sent several clips to Younis Tsouli—aka “Irhabi007” (“Terrorist 007” in Arabic), an al Qaeda webmaster, recruiter, and propagandist—and to Aabid Hussein Khan, a facilitator for two Pakistan-based terrorist groups. Both Tsouli and Khan have since been convicted of terror offenses in the U.K.

At the time, not much was known about the two. If a definite fact did exist, it was that they began to immerse themselves further and further into radical Islam without making family or friends aware. This is supported by their following act: international movement. The FBI file continues:

That summer (2005), Ahmed and Sadequee took separate trips overseas. Ahmed went to Pakistan, meeting with Khan and asking to attend a training camp and engage in jihad (he was talked out of it by his family). Sadequee was off to Bangladesh, where he joined with Tsouli and a Swedish extremist named Mirsad Bektasevic to form a violent jihadist organization known as “Al Qaeda in Northern Europe.” In October, just a few days after being in contact with Sadequee, Bektasevic was arrested in Sarajevo armed to the teeth; he was later convicted of terrorism.

According to Federal Agents on the case (known as “Northern Exposure”), both Ahmed and Sadequee attempted to lie about their travel habits, their communications, and various online activities. Agents were quoted as saying that both individuals were in touch with suspected

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77 FBI, "The Jihadists of Georgia, Part 1."

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

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terrorists in almost a dozen separate countries. Both men were convicted for their acts in attempts
to provide terror organizations with information in late 2006.\textsuperscript{80}

In the court proceedings, Ahmed appeared to cater to his own religious identity rather
than to the evidence at hand. A courtroom reporter stated that he cited not only Quranic verse but
also tried to link the religion of Islam with Christianity.\textsuperscript{81} The proceedings in court exposed
Ahmed as shy in nature and insecure in his faith. While possible that this could have been an act
in favor of the defense (in claims that he was not a hardline-radical Muslim), it is very possible
that Ahmed was struggling with not only his religious identity, but stability within his family.
This thought is supported by the fact that both his older sister as well as his father testified in
court that “Ahmed was searching for his Muslim identity.”\textsuperscript{82}

\textbf{Analysis of Ahmed and Sadequee}

The one clear point of analysis involved with the Ahmed and Sadequee case is the fact
that recruitment took place in a public channel environment (online forums), yet was mediated
by those that were essentially screening the two young men for their commitment to the cause.
The Rand Project piece offers up a theory that may exhibit the most applicable recruitment traits
titled \textit{The Seed Chrystal Pattern} [Appendix B-2].\textsuperscript{83}

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesubscript{80} Murgatroyd, "Ex-Georgia Tech Student Convicted on Terrorism Charge."
\end{footnotesize}

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesubscript{81} Ibid.
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\footnotesubscript{82} Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesubscript{83} Gerwehr and Daly, 79.
\end{footnotesize}
In this case recruiters may seek to provide a context for self-recruitment. This may be compared to lowering the temperature of a glass until the water inside it cools and then ice crystals form as the seeds of a complete freeze. Once individuals emerge within the population as new recruits, they will often follow the pattern of the infection. In “seed crystal” recruitment, critical variables include the type of environmental forces being used to “chill the glass,” and the durability of the “freeze.”

In terms of Ahmed and Sadequee, both individuals more or less banked off of one another in terms of operational security. Without an organic touch point with a jihadist affiliate other than online, it was impossible for them to prove themselves operationally secure to the mentioned terror affiliates. With a keen desire to prove themselves to whomever they were communicating with, the young men provided clear, documented scouting points for potential acts of terror. Conversely, the “cooling agent” that “chilled the glass” that led to the “freeze” of utter conviction to assist or execute acts of jihad, was the willingness of these aforementioned associates to continuously communicate with Ahmed and Sadequee, thus allowing them to believe that they were making progress. This leads more into the aspect of “funnel” recruitment. Once in contact, “funnel recruitment” puts the potential recruit through a vetting process. “A recruiter may use an incremental, or phased, approach when he or she believes a target population is ripe for recruitment yet requires a significant transformation in identity and motivation.” Included in this type of recruitment is the encouragement to participate in group/team-building activities, like what was noted with the men practicing paramilitary tactics with paintball guns.

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84 Gerwehr and Daly, 77.

85 Ibid., 77.

86 Ibid.
In terms of the two individuals, one can examine their backstory to the effect that they were essentially outsiders. Both early 20s Middle Eastern males in a traditionally southern, American city, they were assuredly part of the minority. Ahmed and Sadequee appeared to have little to no motivational goals in terms of future occupation. While Ahmed was at engineering school, it appears that he was rather unwilling to apply it to what many 20-somethings refer to as a “real-life job”. Sadequee, living with his parents and family, most likely sought independence but was not achieving it with the income of a non-profit employee. Both men went as far as to leave the country to pursue a purpose within jihadist organizations; thusly implying their willingness to risk discovery and capture by U.S. authorities.

Ahmed’s case provides a very curious point in terms of his court proceedings. The terms “shy and confused” followed by the connotation that he was lost in his faith, do not seem to follow up with someone willing to go as in-depth as he and Sadequee. It is very possible that with the development of his friendship with Sadequee, Ahmed desired to further strengthen his faith; confused on how to do so, he willingly opened himself to radicalism. This movement towards radical jihad may have helped him feel justified within his cause and gave him (as well as Sadequee) a purpose greater than what they were experiencing in the Atlanta suburbs.

Russell Defreitas (2007)

New York City’s John F. Kennedy Airport is one of the most frequented airports in the world. Spanning nearly 5,000 acres with an extensive road system spanning 30 total miles, the airport contributes approximate $37.3 billion dollars in economic activity to the New York/New...
Jersey area annually.\textsuperscript{87} 37,000 employees maintain and operate the airport’s massive infrastructure and must be privy to knowledge concerning everything ranging from utilities to security. With thousands of flights departing and arriving, JFK is a hub for millions of travelers.

63 year old Russell Defreitas [Appendix A-5], a former baggage handler at JFK, lived somewhat of a lonely existence.\textsuperscript{88} Having been a contractor at the airport from 1990-93, Defreitas appeared to have been unable to keep a steady position within the airport’s structure.\textsuperscript{89} Finally settling as a baggage handler, the Guyanese immigrant (a naturalized American citizen), found a residence on Albany Avenue in Brooklyn.\textsuperscript{90} According to one of his neighbors (identified as “Mr. Watts”), Defreitas was unable to fill out the necessary paperwork for his occupation (and one would assume for his place of stay), but was assisted by a brother. His employment as a baggage handler would ultimately come to an end for undisclosed reasons. It was at this point that the divorced father of two vacated his Brooklyn home and began to make money any way he could. A New York Times article (dated June 3, 2007) profiling Defreitas states:

\begin{quote}
He also lived alone for several years in an apartment on North Conduit Avenue, near the airport. The daughter of his landlord described him yesterday as a “polite man” who always paid his rent on time. When he finally ended up leaving, he told the landlord that the weather was rough on his health and the cold was tough on his arthritis, the daughter said. Mr. Defreitas was always thinking of ways to make money, Mr. Watts said. He had
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.

been in a car accident, and he spoke to Mr. Watts about his hopes of getting rich by winning a lawsuit. He sold books on a street corner in Queens and would ask his friends to give him their broken air-conditioners and refrigerators. He shipped the items to his girlfriend’s sister in Guyana so she could repair and sell them, Mr. Watts said.

Once a fan of American jazz culture (particularly appreciating the sounds of the saxophone), Defreitas became increasingly bitter with his surroundings as he began to show signs of resentment towards the United States. With a series of trips to Guyana, he began to show customary trends of being a Muslim. Donning traditional garb and identifying himself as Mohammed, Defreitas became a very close follower of a radical imam named Kareem Ibrahim. Located in nearby Trinidad and Tobago (relative to Guyana), Ibrahim led a Shiite Muslim community with an extreme interpretation of the Quran. Toting the argument that killing any non-Muslim would result in admission to heaven, the imam was recorded in conversation having said: “fight it out, kill who you could kill and go back to Allah”. To the later surprise of many that knew Defreitas, it was his ears that the imam’s words fell upon.

With his knowledge of JFK’s advanced fuel pipelines (which extend from New Jersey into Staten Island and ultimately into Queens), Defreitas and three conspirators sought to create a chain reaction that would blow up the pipeline. Charged by the imam’s influence, Defreitas and co. carried out intense and precise reconnaissance that included photographic/video surveillance

91 Barnett, "Imam Sentenced to Life in Prison in JFK Airport Terror Plot."

92 Ibid.

93 Buckley and Rashbaum, "4 Men Accused of Plot to Blow Up Kennedy Airport Terminals and Fuel Lines."
as well as satellite imaging (via Google Earth).\textsuperscript{94} All of this was in the hopes of causing extensive financial damage as well as catastrophic loss of human life. Given his activity and sudden change in behavior, Defreitas became a person of interest on the radar of the Joint Terrorist Task Unit in mid 2006.\textsuperscript{95} The unit placed an informant within the Brooklyn mosque where Defreitas frequented. It was within the confines of the mosque and during trips to locations of reconnaissance that he began to expose his anti-American sentiment, and ultimate plan of attack. According to the task unit informant, Defreitas discussed how his career as a baggage handler increasingly strengthened his hatred due to the fact that he was loading US weaponry being sent to Israel. Said weaponry was destined to “kill Muslims” according to his logic.\textsuperscript{96} The New York Times states:

Mr. Defreitas envisioned “the destruction of the whole of Kennedy” and theorized that because of underground pipes, “part of Queens would explode.” He boasted that in addition to a huge of loss of life — “even the twin towers can’t touch it,” he said — the attack would devastate the United States economy and strike a deep symbolic blow against a national icon, President John F. Kennedy, officials said. “Any time you hit Kennedy, it is the most hurtful thing to the United States,” he said in one of dozens of conversations secretly recorded during the 18-month investigation, according to the complaint. “They love John F. Kennedy,” he said. “If you hit that, this whole country will be in mourning. It’s like you kill the man twice.”

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\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{96} Buckley and Rashbaum, "4 Men Accused of Plot to Blow Up Kennedy Airport Terminals and Fuel Lines.”
Defreitas sought to meet with Jammat al-Muslimeen, the most prominent Islamic radical group in Trinidad and Tobago.\textsuperscript{97} Hoping to be escorted by imam, Kareem Ibrahim, his meeting with the loose Al Qaeda affiliate was to gain financial aid and advanced tactical assistance. While the attack plans were relatively infantile in nature, they were progressive for a lone-wolf strike. Before a meeting could be arranged, Defreitas was ultimately arrested on June 2, 2007.\textsuperscript{98}

Given his age, this man is an outlier in terms of the general age group within this study. At 63, Defreitas displays an abnormality in that he radicalized at such an older age. This being said, his backstory relatively coincides with the other cases discussed within this document. One must first examine his social situation. Considered to be somewhat of a vagabond, he represented a man of isolation with little to no social connections. Devoid of his family ties, Defreitas was described by one NYPD investigator as a “sad sack”.\textsuperscript{99} It was also assumed that he had limited mental capabilities given his inability to hold a job and appeared to be barely literate according to his former neighbor. Upon finding out the Defreitas was the mastermind of the plot, Mr. Watt’s stated: “He’s not that type of person . . . he’s not smart enough”.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{97} Chris Zambelis, "Al-Qaeda's Inroads into the Caribbean," The Jamestown Foundation, October 21, 2005, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=591\&no_cache=1#.VxgiEDaAOko.

\textsuperscript{98} Buckley and Rashbaum, "4 Men Accused of Plot to Blow Up Kennedy Airport Terminals and Fuel Lines."

\textsuperscript{99} Buckley and Rashbaum, "4 Men Accused of Plot to Blow Up Kennedy Airport Terminals and Fuel Lines."

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
According to PayScale Human Capital, a salary information service, the average hourly rate for a baggage handler is approximately $12.76 per hour with a minimum of $9.36 p/h.\textsuperscript{101}

With the assumption that Defreitas was unable to hold onto his employment for more than 3-5 years, that income becomes a mute point as shown by his stints of homelessness. This taken into account, the combination of lack of social connection, family ties, and possible accumulation of debt, one could assume that Defreitas had little to no conviction, confidence, even true sense of purpose.

In terms of his radicalization, Defreitas found purpose, as his trips to Guyana appeared to only encourage his “call to jihad”. Given his financial background, it is safe to say that he did not have a cellphone, yet was willing to save his money in order to fly back to his country of origin. This leads to the theory that he wanted human contact with radical imam Kareem Ibrahim and ultimate approval (in “face-to-face” format) from leaders within Jammat al-Muslimeen. This thought is furthered by his eagerness to take the informant within his local Brooklyn mosque “under his wing”, so to speak. He insisted that his new “friend and conspirator” travel with him to Guyana as well as play a crucial role in his master plan: “As described in 33-page complaint, Mr. Defreitas seemed enraptured by the plot. He believed the informant had been ‘sent by Allah to be the one’ and fantasized about the paradise that would await them after their martyrdom.”\textsuperscript{102}

**Russel Defreitas Analysis**

\textsuperscript{101} PayScale Human Capital, "Baggage Handler (Aviation/Airline) Salary (United States)," PayScale, 2016, http://www.payscale.com/research/US/Job=Baggage_Handler_(Aviation/Airline)/Hourly_Rate.

\textsuperscript{102} Buckley and Rashbaum, "4 Men Accused of Plot to Blow Up Kennedy Airport Terminals and Fuel Lines."
Defreitas offers an outlier case study to this thesis due to the fact that he is far older than any other subject. At the age of 63, it is very rare to find someone willing to radicalize. Generally, the most impressionable ages of one’s life is between the age of 10 until 35, after that an extremely dramatic life event is needed in order to sway an individual from their dispositions. Defreitas’ case is one that is applicable to multiple aspects of the Rand study. He displays traits of “seed crystal” patterns due to the fact that he more or less self-recruited within the continental United States, yet was provided his “cooling agent” with his organic touch-point visits to the radical imam. He was constantly reaffirmed of his beliefs by an unwavering imam and felt as if he had received approval from the radical Muslim community which he sought to visit in his homeland and its neighboring countries. Yet Defreitas was able to recruit others to play key roles within his plot, thus making him a prime candidate for the concept of the “Infection pattern” of recruitment. In this case, Defreitas went from recruit to recruiter in rapid time. The infection pattern [Appendix B-3] is defined as an extremely difficult task, but one that proves effective with right tools:

Frequently a target population is so insular or so difficult to reach that the most effective method is to recruit from within. A trusted agent can be inserted into the target population to rally potential recruits through direct, personal appeals. This method leverages the significant persuasive strength of (1) source credibility, (2) social comparison and validation, and (3) specifically tailored appeals.

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103 Sarver, interview.
104 Gerwehr and Daly, 77.
105 Ibid., 78.
106 Gerwehr and Daly, 78.
Defreitas clearly sought to be the agent of infection to the informant that would ultimately bring him to trial and to his various accomplices. Feeling justified and motivated to fulfill what he felt was the right thing to do in the name of Allah, he was willing to go whatever distance it took in order to see the fulfillment of his plan.

Another very important aspect that was previously touched on is the fact that Mr. Defreitas appeared to have limited access to electronics. While considered unintelligent by his neighbor, it is possible that he was cognizant that he could be under surveillance by the US Government for his suspicious activity. This being said, there is a high likelihood that age and technological wherewithal may have played an even more significant part of this. Lost, devoid of purpose, and without contact with his family, one may ask what exactly did he live for? While there is no documented proof, analysis of similar subjects with like backgrounds suggests that radical jihad lent Defreitas a sense of purpose and involvement. By meeting face-to-face with the imam and radicals, Russell Defreitas may have finally experienced a level of physical and emotional appreciation and support that he had not encountered within the last twenty years of his life.

Yet another aspect in play is the fact that Defreitas sought to destroy the former supplier of his income. Potentially bitter about his former jobs (and struggle to keep them), he may have justified JFK airport as a prime point of American weakness as a covert means to an end. This meaning that while supplying jihadist rhetoric to the attack as a whole as means of justification, he could have just been merely using radical Islam as an excuse to rebel against what he may have viewed as an oppressor.
Chapter 3: Channeling Lions: From Manhattan to the Middle East
“We were working 18 hour days typically, while we were over there. Keep in mind that this was 2010, maybe 2011. When we got back we had no idea what Twitter was; let alone what it would be.”

This telling quote, coming from U.S. Army personnel, was echoed by Lt. Rob Sarver concerning his platoon of SEALs. No stranger to the eruption of social media, the men that our armed forces were combatting, were technologically more advanced than they appeared. Building off the concept of “the young lion”, prospective recruits are welcomed by the Islamic State to take part in something bigger than themselves. An obvious appeal to the more youthful and susceptible crowd, the “young lion” implies one who is brave, steadfast, and willing to fight until the death for their beliefs. This is the supposed call to the Islamic State.

The primary differences in what the Islamic State brings to the table versus what one would expect from Al Qaeda is best summarized in a recent interview with a representative of the United States Navy:

One must consider this idea of the Young Lion. The Islamic State shows a keen need to demonstrate how cool it is to be a part of this (the Caliphate). You get cammies (desert camouflage military uniforms), guns, etc. There is a certain character that they are going after. They feel go after that insecure, younger crowd…they are more impressionable. They want to polarize these people. Al Qaeda and ISIS have solidified that fact that they are two different organizations. The rebels (lone-wolf- Al Qaeda), where as long as you do Allah’s will (random acts of terror) . . . then join up. ISIS is trying to create a pure, Muslim army. You have to be very strict on your Muslim religion; if you shave your beard and drink alcohol, you’re out. The younger generations are into that hardline way of thinking. ISIS has stated that they are attempting to eradicate all non-believers. Those that join now are there because they want to be. [In reference to social media platforms particularly Twitter] The fact that the Islamic State can take their message and effectively bring it to anyone from the Middle East to Manhattan brings a whole new spectrum to the world of radical Islamic recruitment. 

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107 Interview with a member of the U.S. Army, phone interview by author, October 30, 2015.

108 Interview with a member of the U.S. Navy, phone interview by author, October 30, 2015.
By virtue of recruiting IT specialists, who according to Atwan, are expert marketers with “death” as their brand, the Islamic State’s media department is one step ahead than many would think.109 Headed by self-radicalized, Massachusetts native, Ahmed Abousamra, the department pushes advanced media productions that depict not only violence, but of youth playing integral roles within the Caliphate.110 The entire production as a whole serves a dual purpose: a warm welcome to the Caliphate and a chilling warning to those who do not seek to join.

**Moner Abusalha (2014)**

Moner Abusalha [Appendix A-6] walked out of his Vero Beach, Florida home for the last time to embark on a new journey, a journey that would leave behind some of his favorite things such as basketball and video games.111 This young man was considered amicable by many of the friends that he had in middle school. They would play pickup games of basketball and do all of the things social young men do.112 Yet, while his friends went on to high school and on to girls, varsity sports, and potential college hopes, Moner fell by the wayside. A Muslim by birth, Moner appeared to be moderate in nature by his friends, one even saying that “they never discussed

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109 Atwan, 12.

110 Ibid., 15.


112 Ibid.
religion”. While his friends and fellow peers ascended through Sebastian River High School, Abusalha would ultimately drop out. Following this, he would go in and out of schooling due to poor attendance, but finally earned his high school degree in March 2009. From this point, he enrolled at Kaiser University, but only attended for less than a year; this same process would be echoed in only two brief semesters at Indian River State College and then Seminole State College.

Khirbet al-Joz was not like Vero Beach. The small Syrian village didn’t have the soft sand beaches, friendly neighbors, nor the occasional roadside barbeque stand. Vero Beach is the kind of place that one grows up in and wants to come back to. A predominantly Christian town, it has often been described as the “hidden Hamptons of Florida” and has been featured in many major magazines as such. Somehow, the Syrian village appealed to Moner far more than Vero Beach did. Having been disconnected from his parents for over a year, Abusalha had removed himself from not only the hometown, but also the home itself. In a video streamed from the village, he states that his journey from Florida to Turkey then over the border was easy because

113 Robles, "Seeking Clues in Man’s Arc From Life in Florida to Fatal Blast in Syria."

114 Robles, "Seeking Clues in Man’s Arc From Life in Florida to Fatal Blast in Syria."

115 Vero Beach is my hometown. I have mutual friends that knew of Moner. But more importantly, I speak so intimately of Vero Beach due to my connection with it.

“Allah made it so”. He had sores on his feet from countless miles of walking yet appeared undeterred by the trek.

Moner Abusalha’s face appears as one of an outcast. While claiming to be a welcomed member of the Caliphate, he speaks in broken, classical Arabic with a stutter and an unnatural cadence that seeks to emulate the speech habits of native speakers. Bracing an AK-47 against his shoulder [Appendix A-7], the basketball-crazed, Vero Beach boy now sits across from a camcorder yelling obscenities at his former country’s President.

“Listen to my words, you big kufar [infidels]. You think, oh, that you killed Osama bin Laden? You did nothing. You sent him to Jennah [paradise], Al-Hamdulillah [thanks and praise be to God]. You think that you have won — you have never won! You will never defeat Islam.”

Clearly feeling empowered, by his chance to speak out against the country that he “hated”, Moner had also burned his U.S. Passport. Peter Bergen’s United States of Jihad further discusses the seemingly “home made video”.

“Just sitting down five minutes drinking a cup of tea with mujahideen is better than anything I’ve ever experienced in my whole life. I lived in America! I know how it is. You have all the fancy amusement parks, and the restaurants, and the food, and all this crap and the cars and you think you’re happy. You’re not happy, you’re never happy. I was never happy. I was always sad and depressed. Life sucked . . .”

Bergen continues:

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118 Syria Focus, “American Nusra Front Martyr, Munir Mohammed Abou Saleha Aka Abi Hareera Al Amreeki.”

119 Giglio, "One Man’s Journey To Become the First American Suicide Bomber in Syria."
Over footage of a woman in a black burka shooting an automatic rifle, Abusalha tells the story of a Russian woman fighting for Al-Qaeda who supposedly conducted a suicide operation in Pakistan. [Abusalha] says, “She’s a thousand men. Not like you men who sit at home.” In the Paradise of martyrdom, he promises, “A tree will pick the fruit off of itself and hand it to you,” while you enjoy the company of a woman so lovely “you would die from her beauty”.  

Moner may have held on to these thoughts and promises of paradise as the giant truck he was driving bumped along the rough Syrian mountain path. “I see Paradise and can smell Paradise” he reportedly radioed to fellow fighters tracking his progress.  

Moner most likely tried to hold his determination until he self-detonated himself and his payload of explosives into a government outpost along the Syrian border. He most likely tried to forget the part of his ultimate suicide video where he cries when speaking to his mother and brother. He most likely tried to remember his message to his brother to “be strong” and his hurried Arabic to his father. With the truck’s homemade armored plating and black flag with white Arabic letters painted across, maybe he felt confident, though it is more than likely that he still strained for a sense of confidence and purpose.  

Upon detonation, Moner solidified himself as the first known American suicide bomber in Syria. The day after his death, Jabhat al-Nusra, the Syrian branch of Al Qaeda released the video with his last words (before the split of al-Nusra and the Islamic State). With his name 

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121 Bergen, 244.

122 Syria Focus, “American Nusra Front Martyr, Munir Mohammed Abou Saleha Aka Abi Hareera Al Amreeki.”

123 Giglio, "One Man’s Journey To Become the First American Suicide Bomber in Syria."
colored in gold with digital embers cascading towards the bottom of the screen, Moner may have been able to witness what the world’s last vision of him would be. Much like the pro-Islamic posts that he would create on Facebook, he may have imagined that he would receive praise as a supporter willing to give his life for the Caliphate. Along with his final words were catchy songs of prayer sung in Arabic. With an eerily stoic tint to the video, the final image of the truck driving down the road and out of sight indicated that Moner was destined to be the driver. The final scene of the video shows a mass explosion, implying that this was the death of Moner and the countless government workers in the depot.

Moner Abusalha Analysis

Outwardly, Moner appeared to be committed to his faith. But according to the fighters, he may have had more of a humanitarian hold. Mike Giglio of Buzzfeed.com was able to interview Moner’s rebel friends in a Turkish border town:

They were uncomfortable with the idea of suicide attacks — “as Syrians, we don’t think of suicide missions,” Abu Ahmed said — but insisted that Abusalha wasn’t an extremist. They described him instead as someone who came to help when much of the world had left them to their fate. “I think he came from the U.S.A. to Syria not because he’s a Muslim, or because he has a jihadi mind-set — no. Just because he’s human,” Abu Ahmed said. “And his humanity pushed him to come to Syria and stop the injustice.”

It is very plausible to while Moner was in Syria, he was still an outsider to the collective group. In multiple propaganda videos, he appears to be chatting with fellow ISIS members in broken Arabic. Yet something appears to be off in his appearance. Always smiling and seeming to be

124 Giglio, “One Man’s Journey To Become the First American Suicide Bomber in Syria.”
outgoing, one could assume that Absulha sought to appear as enthusiastic as possible to be accepted by the group and its fighters. While his enthusiasm was received and noted as the Buzzfeed interview continues, a profundity can be found in the fact that it appeared that he was there not as much for faith, but for humanity.

Considering Moner’s constant Facebook activity of posts, which included “Islamic sayings and prayers [Appendix A-8] coupled with selfies that were meant to show off his biceps”, one could assume that he sought validation not only in his faith but as the developing adolescent in a small southern (American) town. While his friends continued onto college or as contributors to society, Moner lost his touch with many. In a video detailing his tajir, he discusses one of his Florida friends. The friend, as Moner describes as someone he “loved”, also sought to commit jihad in Syria. At the last minute, the friend left the airport from which Absulha had departed from.

While direct recruitment did not appear to be the case for Abusalha, there appears to be a direct line of propaganda, which he bought into. Upon analyzing the video commemorating his “martyrdom”, he does not mention direct contact with any singular recruiter, rather speaks to the fact that he joined to fight against America as a whole. And his role? As he states, himself, he is a lion. That single quote, transpiring in perhaps 3 seconds of a 30-minute recorded message may be the most significant. This statement allows those analyzing the video to draw that Moner identified himself as a direct member of the group. By virtue of dubbing himself a young lion, he instantly identifies himself as the product of IS recruitment via social media distribution. With

125 Robles, "Seeking Clues in Man’s Arc From Life in Florida to Fatal Blast in Syria."
his statements, the Islamic State capitalized on further recruitment. Because he was the first American suicide bomber in Syria, ISIS distributed videos “commemorating” him as not only a martyr but as someone within the United States that was willing to turn to the Caliphate to further its mission.

Delving deeper into Abusalha’s past, one can reference his final words in more ways than one. Given the knowledge of his backstory: his struggles to keep a foot in higher education, to make a life for himself, etc., living in the Western world was not easy for him. He questions the materialism that he encountered within the United States and Florida (ex: “amusement parks” in reference to nearby Walt Disney World and Universal Studios). It would appear that Moner blames the life he lived in the West as a product of not his own personal failure, but of everyone around him; or Western culture in general. This is why the values of the Islamic State and its Caliphate may have appealed to him. An offer of a stricter lifestyle, a non-materialistic world, and a place where Moner could excel to what he believed to be his full potential.

It is also important to keep in mind that Moner was not without friends. He was considered amicable and fairly intelligent by his peers. Dr. Jack Ryan [pesud.], a professor and theologian of Middle Eastern history offers a theory on how the Islamic State may have recognized that Moner merely wanted to excel in life just a little more than his peers.

There is a personality profile in the idea of recruitment of the individual: who from a superficial sense is successful and well-adjusted; but who has a drive to become an apex leader/predator. Essentially this means that they seek to become the king of the kingdom or to be driven to the highest place of honor in their own minds. There are unique individuals out there not to be a piece of significance, but to be the most dominant. They, knowingly, are not going to be Bill Gates or the President of the United States. But upon
joining they believe “I can now be a young lion amongst cubs”. There is a pathway to the immediate solution to finding apex achievement.\textsuperscript{126}

By virtue of applying Moner to a task such as detonating himself at a key government post in Syria, ISIS planners made him feel extremely important. It was essential to the cause and further propaganda push that he felt as if he had genuine purpose within his own mind and what he hoped to display to others. He was not uneducated or dimwitted, he was fully in the loop that he was going to die for the cause.

One of the most interesting aspects that may indicate the expertise of IS recruitment was the fact that the actions that Moner took once joining the Caliphate were extremely \textit{visual} to the public eye. Moner appeared to have accessed most of the radical propaganda on Facebook, obviously a very visually exposing platform that allows viewers to \textit{see} the world around them and the visual of approval via the like button. Abusalha undoubtedly viewed what would be his martyrdom tape before he self-detonated, he specifically knew that it would be distributed worldwide by IS IT specialists. One must note how he attempts to speak in a dialect much like the native Syrians when discussing his hatred of America then breaks into his native American accent when he gets emotional about his family. It was all a show for him, it was his chance to be brave on camera, to be a genuine part of a mission that would have real meaning. He was willing to immerse himself as much as humanly possible in order to show the world that his actions mattered. Just as he had seen the images on Facebook and Twitter he was now going to be one of those images [Appendix A-9]. Everyone would see Moner Abusalha go from a Vero Beach cub to a Syrian lion.

\textsuperscript{126} Jack Ryan [pseud.], phone interview by author, January 16, 2016.
23-year-old “Alex” clutches her teddy bear as she speaks [Appendix A-10]. In another scene, she playfully leans against a playground structure and plays on her cellphone. Her voice slightly flutters when she talks about Faisal Mustafa, a “new friend”. The CCD teacher and occasional babysitter describes her Washington town as “the middle of nowhere” and “safe, but boring”. Single and living with her grandparents, her new friend wasn’t accepted too well. Thing being said, Faisal was not like the people that Alex had grown accustomed to in her hometown. “I did not have a lot of friends around here, but I met more people online” she quips in her quiet, hushed voice. Her face shrouded by intentional lighting, Alex is nervous and excited as she opens her personal story to video editors of the New York Times. Her face never shown, she must remain unrecognizable for reasons of security and scrutiny. She just wants to keep her friend, Faisal, in the loop. She wants to do what he praises her for; she wants to be recognized for what she is.

“Alex” is pseudonym for the 23 year-old Washingtonian girl who was successfully recruited by an affiliate of the Islamic State. Faisal Mustafa, married 51 year old male located in London, has been arrested twice for suspected bomb-making. Rather than make bombs, Faisal moved onto “answering the questions” that many Americans seek answers to. Why the violence? Why the gore? Why kill? He kindly answers them all. While doing this, he simultaneously

127 The entirety of the case information regarding “Alex” comes from the New York Times article.

introduces her to an online community of friends that all support her curiosity. In fact, they welcome her to join their community, to be a “sister”. The supplementary New York Times article states:

Alex’s online circle — involving several dozen accounts, some operated by people who directly identified themselves as members of the Islamic State or whom terrorism analysts believe to be directly linked to the group — collectively spent thousands of hours engaging her over more than six months. They sent her money and plied her with gifts of chocolate. They indulged her curiosity and calmed her apprehensions as they ushered her toward the hard-line theological concepts that ISIS is built on.

A Skype direct message comes from Mustafa:

Your a nice person with a beautiful character in many ways ur much better than many so called muslims

She lies stomach down on her bed showing the NYT editors some of the “gifts” that she was sent [Appendix A-11]. Holding up a copy of The Rights & Duties of Women in Islam she playfully remarks, “I like this one because it elevates women”. Then, pointing to a thicker book concerning the dress code for women of Islam, she “doesn’t like that one because it’s thicker than the other one and it’s just about how to dress”. Her small frame isn’t hidden in the shadows as she continues to play a video depicting how women should put on their headscarves. “I think this is the one he [Faisal] sent me”. The scene cuts out to Alex sitting by the window saying “I don’t think ISIS is as bad as everyone says. I think they brought stability to the land, it might be one of the safest places to live in the Middle East”.

Teddy bear in her clutch, Alex explains that her therapist says that she’s “emotionally immature, quick to make decisions, and can display adverse reactions”. This may have played a role in her life situation described in the NYT article as:
After dropping out of college last year, she was earning $300 a month babysitting two
days a week and teaching Sunday school for children at her church on weekends. At
home, she spent hours streaming movies on Netflix and updating her social media
timelines.“All the other kids spread their wings and flew,” says her 68-year-old
grandmother, who has raised eight children and grandchildren in a modest but tidy home
the size of a double-wide trailer. “She is like a lost child.”

Alex went on to attempt to work with a daycare center for a brief stint and the on to a call center;
both occupational pressures were too much for her to handle. With loneliness and lack of purpose
as driving constants in her life, Alex fell deeper and deeper into conversations with Faisal despite
discouragement and concern coming from her grandmother. These conversations with Faisal
became increasingly more consistent after her prior communications with an ISIS fighter fell
through when he went “gray” (offline, assumed to be killed in battle). The gifts kept coming.
Chocolates, prayer rugs, more headscarves; it was all “innocent” in Alex’s eyes. With these
material gifts came constant guidance on Islamic rhetoric and direction towards quotes in the
Bible that may help her disprove her belief in Christ. She constantly had questions given her
willingness to teach Sunday school, but they were answered with enthusiasm and sensitivity.

Alex finally had something to do:

Her Twitter timeline through that period is peppered with posts from her that begin,
“Sincere question,” followed by a theological query. They were answered immediately. If
before she waited hours to hear back from friends, now her iPhone was vibrating all day
with status updates, notifications, emoticons and Skype voice mail messages . . . By the
last week of October, Alex was communicating with more than a dozen people who
openly admired the Islamic State. Her life, which had mostly seemed like a blurred series
of babysitting shifts and lonely weekends roaming the mall, was now filled with
encouragement and tutorials from her online friends.

Now it was time for Alex to act and to prove herself to her friends. As October turned into

November and November to December, her prayers to Christ ceased and her faith in Islam grew.
Encouraged by her “Twitter friends” to solidify her position within the community, she had to convert to Islam. With Faisal as her main support system, she decided to do just that three days after Christmas in 2014. The NYT piece explains:

. . . All she needed to do was repeat the phrase “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger,” with complete belief and commitment, in the presence of two Muslims. This presented an obstacle for Alex, who still knew no Muslims in person. Faisal argued that she could post her declaration of faith, known as the Shahada, on Twitter, and the first two people who read it would count as her witnesses… Faisal acknowledged her declaration right away. So did another online friend, who went by the screen name Hallie Sheikh and whom Faisal had asked to serve as the second witness. Within hours, Alex had doubled her Twitter following. “I actually have brothers and sisters,” she posted before going to bed. “I’m crying.”

Alex most likely walked out of her small room in Washington State to see her grandparents sitting on their living room sofa. The small confines of the house may have once held her captive physically and emotionally. Yet she had just gained a new family, a new purpose, and a new adventure. Brought to tears by this realization, her decision was instantly validated by “friends” from around the world; what her grandparents thought of her didn’t matter to her. Unaware of the extent of her recruitment, they were more concerned with the gifts that were relentlessly pouring in. For the first time in her life, Alex became the subject of what she felt as “celebrity status”, she had gained purpose and identity.

Alex slowly began to find herself within the confines of hard-line Islam. Faisal even went as far as to attempt to find a husband within the Islamic community. Alex was prepared to entertain the idea. In February 2015, Alex experienced something that was foreign to her in this new world, doubt. She was accused of being a spy by a popular ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, and the “Twitter friends” that she now had began to withdrawal from her.
Immediately, people she considered her friends began blocking her. If only days earlier she had been trying to disentangle herself, now she was begging them not to cut her off. She offered to provide her Twitter password to anyone who wanted to examine her messages. “To whom it may concern,” she wrote. “A bunch of people thought I was a spy and I’m not, honest,” she said. “I’ve been a Muslim since December 28th and I took the Shahada on Twitter and I’m about 92% sure that being Muslim saved my life.”

Desperate not to lose her friends, Alex was clearly strained by the thought of going back into isolation, without purpose. She thought about the necessary move that Faisal was proposing: moving to Syria and establishing herself as a devout Muslim in the eyes of many. She was even prepared to bring her 11 year old brother along to Austria to meet her potential new husband, as it is customary for a “mahram”, or male relative, to escort a woman.

Alex’s family ultimately intervened as packages from Europe flooded in. She was honest with them as to what was happening and allowed the New York Times access to the situation. The Federal Bureau of Investigation would come in during the spring of 2015 and download all of the communications performed by Alex and Faisal. Her grandmother changed her passwords to all of her social media accounts, but forgot one…Skype. Waiting for the FBI to conclude their investigation and her grandparents to go on vacation, Alex logged into Skype and immediately resumed her conversation with Faisal, her now “old friend”.

“Alex” Analysis:

Alex, by far and away, is the most in-depth case of IS social media recruitment available to public eye from cover-to-cover. By virtue of understanding her trajectory with Faisal and her new “family”, one immediately notes that Alex felt unfulfilled and lonely. A product of a small Washington town, without mention of her real mother and father, one must assume that Alex was
suffering somewhat of an identity crisis coupled with clear mental and social issues. With obvious severe disconnection with the world around her, the key to her recruitment was access and availability to companionship on behalf of Faisal and her new “Twitter friends/family”.

Alex’s dissatisfaction with her life may not have been palpable to those around her. Maybe considered to be “lost” by her grandparents, there was obvious surprise on the behalf of her family when they were made aware of the situation. This indicates that they did not have access to Alex’s emotions, yet Faisal did. By virtue of being available at her beck and call, Faisal allowed Alex to feel as if she had an instant friend rather than be within the isolation of her small Washington town. The constant flow of information is what fed Alex’s drive to radicalize. There was no clear understanding of the religion, rather there was only the hunger to be a part of something bigger than her current situation. This speaks exactly parallel to Atwan’s discussion on the need to provide constant information to potential recruits:

The relentless stream of information from the extremists is also used to build up the image of Islamic State as an emotionally attractive place where people ‘belong’, where everyone is a ‘brother’ or ‘sister’. A kind of slang, melding adaptations of shortenings of Islamic terms with street language, is evolving among the English-language fraternity on social media platforms in an attempt to create a ‘jihadi cool’. A jolly home life is portrayed via Instagram images where fighters play with fluffy kittens and jihadist ‘poster girls’ proudly display the dishes they have created. These ‘Muslimas’ also tweet about domestic concerns or the absence of decent clothing: ‘Honestly we need some professional dressmakers for sister in Islamic State’ tweeted one young woman, @UmmMariAndaluciya.129

By virtue of building up and constantly maintaining the stream of information that expressed the normality that is involved with living within the Caliphate, IS made itself extremely “natural” in terms of domestic life. Note how there was not just an electronic connection, but Faisal and

129 Atwan, 14.
friends made a physical connection with Alex by sending along normal domestic items ranging from chocolates to head scarves. The feel of the textbooks, the smell of the chocolates, the visual of seeing herself in a head scarf all made conversion and the Islamic State real(istic) to Alex.

There is something to be said of Alex’s background as a Twitter user. This implies that she may not be compelled to expose herself on a superficial level. This is reaffirmed by the fact that she utilized the Skype “audio” option when communicating with Faisal (Skype offers a live webcam feed, which is the most popular option. The “audio” option does not allow users to see each others face, essentially rendering the platform to be a internet-based telephone). While not being able to visualize her Twitter friends, they more or less materialized in front of her in the form of the gifts and cards she received; thus affirming their existence.

The recruiting process used with Alex made her feel as if she had a place of belonging within the Caliphate. A young woman in her early twenties normally begins to think about finding a mate and procreating. Alex’s background in Sunday school education as well as babysitting indicates that she was well versed and potentially ready to partake in personal child rearing. With the promise of finding a husband and building a home within the Caliphate, Alex felt constantly comfortable with her decision to openly communicate with IS citizens. The offer to create a life to which she had failed to (so far) within the United States was reason enough for her to convert electronically and pledge herself to joining the Caliphate.

Usaamah Rahim (Summer 2015)
Usaamah Rahim [Appendix A-12] seemed pleasant enough to those around him. A product of a stable family background, the extremely observant Muslim man came from a family that supported his decisions and the fortitude of his faith. The 26 year-old black man worked as a security guard and was described by an assistant imam at the Mosque for Praising Allah as “a very pleasant young man”\footnote{Steve Almasy, "Boston Shooting: Who Was Usama Rahim?," CNN, June 4, 2015, http://www.cnn.com/2015/06/03/us/boston-shooting-usama-rahib/}. Recently married and seemingly passionate about his future, Usaamah appeared to be relatively “normal” in today’s society. According to local records, his upbringing involved one year of schooling (9th grade) at the Academic International School of Saudi Arabia in 2003 then onto Brookline High School (Brookline, MA) in 2004 for the rest of high school.\footnote{Ibid.} He ultimately would attend the Miami-Dade Community College in attempts to obtain a degree.\footnote{Ibid.} In a CNN interview a former guidance counselor and dean at Brookline remembers Usaamah as “a bright young man who benefited from the attention of his teachers and tutors in reaching graduation” also adding that he had no major disciplinary infractions on his school record.\footnote{Jess Bidgood and Dave Philipps, "Portrait of Suspect in Boston Is Disputed," The New York Times, June 04, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/05/us/portrait-of-boston-suspect-usama-rahab-is-disputed.html.}

The inaugural Muhammad Art Exhibit and Contest offered a $10,000 prize for cartoons of the Islamic prophet — depictions that are considered blasphemous by many Muslims around the world. About 200 people attended. The event was sponsored by the American Freedom Defense Initiative (AFDI) and attended by its president and co-founder, Pamela
Geller — who is also president of Stop Islamization of America (SIOA). Both are listed as hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center.\textsuperscript{134}

Usaamah Rahim, with the utmost likelihood, read this exact article or viewed the story from a different news outlet. Many American Muslims were disheartened, disappointed, some even outraged by this event. Americans, despite race or religion, had similar feelings as well. Regardless of who was for or against the event, two radical Muslims: Elton Simpson and Nadir Soofi, attempted to open fire on the event and murder Pamela Geller.\textsuperscript{135} They were only able to injure a security guard before they were dispatched by Garland Police.

Usaamah Rahim and his nephew, 24 year-old David Wright were under surveillance for quite some time. The FBI had been tracking them since Rahim had been on Facebook under the alias of Abu Sufyaan and had “liked” a page that supported the development of IS in 2012.\textsuperscript{136} While authorities were unsure of David Wright’s involvement and relationship with Rahim, suspicions were confirmed with Rahim’s (Sufyaan) Facebook activity. On June 3, 2013 he posted to his wall referring to his cousin as “Dawud Sharif Abdul-Khaliq”:

\begin{quote}
Alhamdolillah. I am married now for the first time and I must say this only occurred by the will and grace of Allaah. And I want to thank my nephew Dawud Sharif Abdul-Khaliq and my good brother Khalid Abdelmoneim for being my two witnesses during that event. May Allaah reward both of them for assisting me by being my two witnesses and helping
\end{quote}


Bidgood and Philipps, "Portrait of Suspect in Boston Is Disputed." lxvii
me devour all of that great food cooked by mother and mother in law. And I want to thank my Dad for helping me out when I needed it and all the hard work and support my mother gave. Allahu akhbar! And lastly but definitely not least, I want to thank my wife for giving me the opportunity to be her husband out of all the men at the masajid.  

While the two were known to the general public as Usaamah Rahim and David Wright of Boston, Massachusetts, they were new men of hardline Islam within the confines of Facebook as their preferred social media platform.

As time went on, Rahim and Wright became increasingly closer and would maintain constant phone conversations. Therefore, when May 25, 2015 came around, Rahim felt compelled to share with Wright what he just ordered on Amazon.com. FBI Special Agent J. Jospeh Galietta writes in the official affidavit of David Wright:

On or about May 26, 2015, Rahim called Wright. During the call, which was recorded Rahim advised Wright that "I just got myself a nice little tool. You know it's good for carving wood and like, you know, carving sculptures . . . and you know . . ." Wright and Rahim then both began laughing. I believe that when Rahim said "nice little tool" that was "good for carving," he was referring to the Marine Raider Bowie fighting knife that he had purchased the previous day. In guarded language, Rahim told Wright about a plan, in which he was involved, to kill a person outside of Massachusetts. Rahim and Wright discussed the motivation for that planned attack. Later in the conversation, Wright told Rahim something was "like thinking with your head on your chest." Both men then burst out laughing. Based upon my training, experience, and involvement in this investigation, I believe this is a reference to the practice of some foreign terrorist organizations to behead targets and place their heads on their chests in propaganda videos.

On May 31, Rahim and Wright met with a “third person” on a beach in Rhode Island to discuss the plans of an attack on a person in “another state”. After this was done, there seemed to an agreement that attack would be carried out soon. Galietta continues to describe the following


At approximately 5:00 a.m. on June 2, 2015, Rahim called Wright and advised him that he had changed his plans and no longer planned to commit an attack in another state. Instead, he said that he was going to "go after" the "boys in blue," which I believe to be a reference to police officers. During this telephonic conversation, which was recorded, the following statements, among other things, were made:

RAHIM: And, ah, but I can't wait that long, I can't wait that long man.
WRIGHT: Are you, are you trying to figure out where, are you trying to go to [the other state]? RAHIM: No.
WRIGHT: You are not, I'm trying to understand, wait, you are not trying to go to [the other state]? RAHIM: No.
WRIGHT: Oh, oh wait a minute, oh ah, you are going to be, ah, you're attempting to go on vacation I see.
RAHIM: Yeah, I'm going to be on vacation right here in Massachusetts . . . I'm just going to ah go after them, those boys in blue. Cause, ah, it's the easiest target and, ah, the most common is the easiest for me . . .

(Galietta's analysis) Based upon my training, experience, and involvement in this case, I believe that "going on vacation," a phrase used repeatedly in conversations between Wright and Rahim, refers to committing violent jihad... Shortly after this conversation, on June 2, 2015, Rahim was on a public street in the Boston area, when he was approached by Boston Police Officers and FBI special agents. Rahim took out one of the knives he had purchased from Amazon.com when he saw the officers and agents. One of the officers told Rahim to drop his weapon and Rahim responded, "you drop yours." Rahim then moved towards the officers while brandishing his weapon, and he was shot by law enforcement.139

To the shock of family, friends, and community, the once friendly and peaceful security guard lay dead in the street. The nation reacted with a mix of emotions, many wary that this was another tragedy involving unnecessary police use of deadly force against a black man.

Ronald S. Sullivan, the lawyer hired by the Rahim family, made a public statement with Usamah’s family standing beside him. Expressing emotions of absolute “shock”, Sullivan (on behalf of the family), stated that the family did not witness anything changes in attitude or demeanor consistent with Islamic radicalization. “Usamah was a son, a husband to his wife, a brother.”

Usamah Rahim Analysis

Rahim’s case poses as extremely unique in the sense that his actions were an attempt at a lone wolf act of terror, yet was dressed as an attack that would be carried out as a young lion. Essentially, Wright attempted to create a random act of violence (typical of an Al Qaeda-esque attack), yet referenced the IS brand of death (“thinking with their heads on their chests”). Rahim’s case represents one of complexity due to the fact that some may argue that he was not necessarily recruited. This piece begs to differ based on the rhetoric that was posted on his Facebook account. By virtue of “liking” a Facebook page that was created an IS affiliate in 2012, Rahim and Wright, in a sense, endorsed the “brand”. They would also repost radical material on their public Facebook “walls” [Appendix A-13].

With both Raheem and Wright’s incognito aliases on Facebook, they were able to access IS propaganda at will. Posting and reposting beautiful images with enchanting scenes of nature


141 Atwan, Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate.
with Arabic themes, Rahim appeared to be peaceful. But that is not the case. If ISIS offers the brand of death, then gore may be its top selling item. Rahim’s attempts at beheading individuals and placing their heads on top of their chests is a sign of emulation of what he witnessed in IS propaganda videos from as early as 2014. Images and videos depicting beheadings, crucifixions, mass shootings, drownings, and even the burning alive of a Jordanian pilot have been circulated by IS’ media department in such high quality that has been described as some of the best viral marketing. What he brings to the table in terms of IS recruitment is what Atwan’s *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate* refers to as the “Zarqawi Factor”.

Seen as a linking factor between the violent ways of Al Qaeda and the advanced gore of the Islamic State, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi [Appendix A-14], otherwise known as Al Qaeda’s premier emir until 2006, was essentially described as from a different mold than other radical leaders. Zarqawi was younger…a worldly, tattooed, Jordanian street-thug-turned-jihadist. He brought an even more extremist and violent element into the Al Qaeda firmament, as well as a Rambo-style obsession with physique (in jail he worked out with rocks). For the younger generation that populates the Islamic State, Zarqawi is a hero and online material refers to him as their ‘first emir’ … Zarqawi was zealous in enforcing his interpretation of Sharia law. Public executions, stoning, and floggings were commonplace in areas under his control and even petty crimes received the harshest punishment … Zarqawi

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142 Doyle, interview.

143 Atwan, 55.

144 Ibid. 55.
believed that psychological terror was as important a weapon in the jihadist arsenal as the Kalashnikov.\footnote{Ibid., 55-56.}

Nick Berg, an American, at age 26 appears on a granulated video in 2004.\footnote{Ibid., 42.} In the beginning of the video, he speaks out in quiet, hushed tones. He names his mother and father from his knees with men in black garb, faces covered standing behind him. His statement is eventually cut off by a man in the middle. The man, Zarqawi, begins to rant in Arabic, getting increasingly forceful by the minute. He eventually takes the military grade knife he is holding and begins hacking at Berg’s throat in attempts to decapitate him. Screaming in agony, Berg falls to his side where he squirms, bound by both his hands and his feet. Zarqawi’s companions attempt to hold the young American down while Zarqawi himself struggles to sever through Berg’s trachea. The last sounds of Berg are screams that turn into somewhat of a brief hiss as his trachea is finally penetrated. Zarqawi’s thugs attempt to pull Berg’s head off which is still attached by loosened tendons and muscle. After almost a full minute of violent hacking and pulling, Berg’s head is place on his chest, blood flows from his torso. The video ends. This was potentially the most graphic video that this thesis study has ever examined, it remains as one of the capstones of radical gore productions [Appendix A-15].

By virtue of being a representative of the Zarqawi factor, Usamaamah Rahim’s case exposes the argument of how people come to join IS after viewing such barbaric things. The answer may be within the fact that the Islamic State has essentially pumped out so many barbaric videos that it may appear somewhat natural to the viewer. Nick Berg’s death shocked and horrified many

\footnote{Ibid., 55-56.}

\footnote{Ibid., 42.}

lxxii
and served as a driving force for the American push for the War on Terror. IS has now made it almost seem like a normal occurrence with new videos coming out week after week; month after month. Rahim and Wright may have known what to expect after viewing these videos, they may have predicted the difficulties of cutting through tendons, the windpipe, and various arteries. Rahim may have known to be prepared for blood spatter as his victim struggled against his grip. The material typically found in R-rated horror movies had been shown to be a reality thanks to IS’ media department. Ultra-violence in the name of jihad had become normal within the United States.

Chapter 4: A New Melting Pot

From the time the United States began its development, to a time not so long ago, a Church would be built at the most elevated piece of land within the township. All who were in the town would look up to see the Cross atop of a steeple. People looked up to see where they had started.
from to where they were in their present state. Now the people of America look up to a cell
tower.147

The Islamic State offers something that Al Qaeda could not: a geographical Caliphate in
which one can start a new life. Al Qaeda pushed for lone wolf attacks as this piece discussed the
“Paintball Gang”, Ahmed and Sadequee, and Russell Defreitas. All of these people shared a
common denominator: they had failed. While units of happiness will never exist in a numerical
sense, one must place themselves in the shoes of these three instances. Whether Chapman or
Abdur-Raheem in their unsuccessful military careers and educational ups and downs; whether
Ahmed and Sadequee’s struggles to fit in and to find fulfilling roles in adult life; or Defreitas
who lost contact with his family and struggled to make a living for himself in the economic
capital of the Western hemisphere: they failed to fulfill their potential. The radical groups that
they conscripted themselves to were able to recruit them without real “concrete” knowledge of
their past experiences. There was an appeal to the man who could not make it. The lone wolf
practice was what Al Qaeda offered to the individual who wanted to make an act of jihad. One
life for one life’s defining act was the essential deal that was offered to these individuals.

Now the Islamic State has offered a home for the lost, the weak, those that seek purpose.
The road to the Caliphate revolves around one thing and one thing only social media. Social
media platforms act as the step-by-step validation of one’s journey from American citizen to an
Islamic radical committed to ISIS. What Al Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and other such groups once
offered in terms of email lists and online magazines has now evolved into an Islamic State-

147 Ryan [pseud.], interview.
dominated technological world. ISIS has instant access to those that wish to find it through advanced IT specialists and recruiters. They seek the young, impressionable American. They seek the ones that look to be a part of something bigger themselves and the “like” button reaffirms their transformation. On nearly every social media post that Moner Abusalha, Alex, or Usaamah Rahim decided to post, repost, etc. they received at least one “like”; a show of human support, maybe something that they had been lacking for quite some time. These three individuals represent the future of homegrown jihadist recruitment. At one point they were someone’s son or daughter, a nephew or niece, they were someone’s neighbor. They were American.

“Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness experiment was founded based on the desire to improve my lot, the lot of my family, and this country that I have come to serve.” This has been the American identity. This identity has now been penetrated by a very interesting paradox; the fact that the Caliphate is a second chance at one had failed to do in the West. The American culture, particularly within adolescents, prides itself on advancement. A young man or woman’s thought process in their teens and twenties revolves around progression, fulfillment, and identity. Where will I go to school? What will be my first job? Who will I marry? These questions invade the mind of the youth and often are a major point of stress and anxiety. The Caliphate now offers an answer that makes those questions seem miniscule. The offer is for a chance to start over; the

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148 Doyle, interview.

149 Ryan [pseud.], interview
American dream reestablished within the Caliphate. Accepting recruits from around the world the Islamic State is creating what they seek to destroy in America: the melting pot.\(^{150}\)

**The “Like” Button**

The younger American generation is a part of the world order that utilizes social media. Hundreds of millions of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, as well as a variety of other platform accounts are in existence. They are all means of instant contact and communication. These platforms act as a true enhancement to the jihadist message. It is doubtful that the “Paintball Gang”, Ahmed or Sadequee, or Defreitas had instant access to an agent of radical Islam to talk to. It is extremely doubtful that they had constant reaffirmation in their beliefs and what they planned to do in order to enact their plans of jihad. They were devoid of support and appreciation of who they were becoming or what they planned to do. Abusalha, Alex, and Rahim could all log on to their social media accounts and have instant connection to a source of support. The message of jihad remained firm to them as they were constantly exposed to what they believed to be validation.

The problem with the *like* button on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and such is that it’s an instant form of validation. There is no fortitude or self-confidence to go out there and succeed on your own. Once social media hit, many people needed and expected instant gratification for menial successes. They bounce around from jobs, they consume much more, because they don’t think that they’re going to live until tomorrow. It has become an addiction for the youth in the sense that they can’t live without that sense of validation for their actions. The “like” button is gratification that has become expected in all aspects of life.\(^ {151}\)

\(^{150}\) Ibid.

\(^{151}\) Sarver, interview.
The Islamic State has mastered the idea of not only massive amounts of information and propaganda distribution, but also the concept of validation through the like button on all major social media platforms. The journey to the Caliphate is an intimidating one for the average American. One must first be successfully recruited without detection by advanced social media monitoring systems. After this “vetting process”, they must make it through American airports and into the Middle East. They must then find a way to get in to the Caliphate, this often involves miles of traversing over rough terrain alone or with a group of like-minded “pilgrims”. The journey to the Caliphate is considered a holy one; it is the duty of the true believer. An American, most likely unfamiliar with the language and dialect, rarely exposed to extreme violence, yet looking to find oneself, may look upon this as a terrifying yet exciting experience.

At the beginning of the production of this thesis, two pieces of literature covering very similar topics were produced. Both pieces have played significant roles in the production of this document and have been referenced often. Abdel Bari Atwan’s *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate* as well as Peter Bergen’s *United States of Jihad: Investigating America’s Homegrown Terrorists* have covered an incredible amount of ground in a relatively new landscape in national security as well as in academia. Both pieces agree that the youthful, marginalized, and socially challenged (American) is the most likely recruit to join the Islamic State. Both acknowledge the fact that world access on social media is a tremendous factor in recruitment and that socio-economic dysfunction is a key player in homegrown radicalization. This document agrees with all of this, but argues that the new homegrown jihadist needs constant reaffirmation through the like button and through the like button only.
Through months of research and source referencing, there has not been one case of American radicalization to the Islamic State that has not involved the possession of at least one social media account. The steps and inherent danger involved with Islamic radicalization have become increasingly complex and precarious. The modern day homegrown radical does not privately convert or worship within the confines of their home or their new mosque, then pick up a weapon and carry out a lone wolf attack as once witnessed with traditional Al Qaeda (and other such groups) tactics. The modern day homegrown radical seeks for a deeper meaning within a superficial world of social media. The only way to have that deeper meaning validated is with the like button.

Consider Moner Abusalha, his voice wavering as he says goodbye to his family but is reaffirmed in his prose as he gestures violently towards the camera when he speaks of the life he once had; the life he supposedly hated. He knew that his final words would be distributed around the world via social media platforms. Even in his last recorded moments he still sought validation and justification for his actions. He knew the potential for massive amounts of reposting and hundreds of thousands of “likes” from the radical community. Think of Alex sitting at her computer, the glow illuminating her face within the small confines of her bedroom. Her tears of joy streaming as her new friends and followers “like” her electronic conversion to Islam via Twitter. She finally had recognition and appreciation for what she believed would be a new life. Reflect on Usaamah Rahim as he constantly streamed the rhetoric of hardline Islam and was met with “likes” and comments of ‘Allahu Akbar’ and digital voices of confirmation that his beliefs were correct. Consider his phone calls to David Wright, a willing friend and fellow
radical; both embracing the violence and desensitization of brutal killing tactics such as beheadings. They were all connected via social media; they were all committed to the brand that ISIS had to offer.

Through each and every step of radicalization, these individuals were given the opportunity to be instantly validated, a chance unavailable to those that had pledged themselves as Lone Wolf operatives to the jihadist groups that preceded the now-dominant Islamic State. No matter what their talent or skill may be, new recruits are offered a place in the ranks of the Islamic State; a purpose and identity essentially guaranteed. Throughout these case studies it remains perceptible that none of these individuals experienced a life-changing religious revival. Rather they sought to rebel against their failures (the lone wolves of Al Qaeda and affiliates) or begin a new life to amend them (the young lions of the Islamic State): the differentiating factor being social media and the subsequent concept of instant connection and validation.

The Road Ahead

In a world that is forever trying to keep up with the latest in technology, we must recognize that the same technology that we possess will ultimately fall into the hands of those that seek to harm us. This inevitable rat race will never end.\textsuperscript{152} The next step of this discussion falls into the concept of civil liberties; think of the battle for technological access between the FBI and Apple Inc. There will be a time where the world will have to fully recognize the power that comes with the connectivity of social media, and its potential to be harnessed negatively.

\textsuperscript{152} Sarver, interview.
Unfortunately many, even in the United States, are unwilling to look past the menial and minute, to engage with the bigger issue. There is clear controversy between the executives of social media platforms and those that seek to keep the United States and its allies safe. In order to appropriately track accounts and radical movements said accounts must be left open and untouched by executives who fear for the overall image of their product. With Twitter’s shutdown of over 126,000 ISIS related accounts, groups like Palantir will struggle to keep on track with the thousands of posts and accessible messages that are being distributed on new accounts…new accounts that they must first find and essentially start the process of research and location all over again. This may be a battle between corporation and government that may not have a final conclusion.

There are smaller level possibilities that may assist in the prevention of future homegrown radicalization. Courses on appropriate social media usage could be provided to the youth much as what one would encounter in terms of mandatory anti-bullying campaigns. Teachers, mentors, and counselors alike should be made aware of what to look for within younger generations. At the most superficial level some of these factors are within social and/or economic challenges, progressive change in social media habits (types of posts: hardline religious rhetoric, violent implication, etc.), and such. The issue with these suggestions for prevention is that they tow a thin line in many aspects that are applicable (but not limited to) racial/religious profiling, assumptive discipline, invasion of civil liberties, the list effectively goes on and on.

153 Doyle, interview.
To the Islamic State and those that follow its rhetoric, we are kafir, the ignorant in our non-belief in hardline Islam and the values of sharia law. We elect our own leaders who in turn act upon the increasing violence that has emerged from the radical world of Islam. Because we elect our own leaders, we are considered to be one victim, unified in one unified beliefs just as the Islamic State considers itself to be. They essentially allow no room for stratified opinion. Ideology has stayed the same in terms of what the United States and its allies are to its radical enemies; soldier or citizen, Americans are the target.

Conclusion

The United States, especially, has created a culture in which one must find success and identity within life at an increasingly young age. This has become who we are. The creation of social media platforms originally started out as a way to share experiences, thoughts, and feelings from a miniscule to a worldly lens. Social media platforms have now become the judgmental scales of success in the eyes of our younger generations. Life events from marriages, to the birth of children, even deaths are commemorated via these platforms. First/new jobs, political opinions, or the casual joke all receive the review of those that have access to the material. The like button acts as the reaffirmation tool that encourages further and progressive use of social media platforms. Jihadist groups have long awaited a source of constant information dissemination and an open pool for recruitment. We have created this open source and have placed an abundance of weight on its value; quite literally publicly trading its stocks as

154 Ryan, interview.

155 Sarver, interview.
it is held at such high value. Al Qaeda and like groups used net, infection, seed crystal, and a variety of other patterns to recruit American citizens; all of these generic in nature and seeking to expose the true in faith and commitment to jihad. Some of their American homegrown recruits may have been committed in faith, but more likely than not, the majority sought an escape to their own failures in life. The Islamic State has now realized that in order to truly radicalize Americans, they must play to the impressionable individual who needs constant validation and gratification; most specifically through social media and the illustrious like button. They know the current status of projected future affairs and priorities of the average American due to this newfound dependence on social media and self-identification within public channels. They know now that if the traditional American dream fails within the continental United States, they can offer a new one within the confines of the Caliphate. All one has to do is submit themselves to the restraints of sharia law.

ISIS knows the weight that is placed on social media; its leaders comprehend the fact that there is a deeper emotional connection within the impressionable American and the like button. What appears to be a superficial form of technology to older generations unfamiliar with the ins and outs of social media platforms, has taken a firm grasp within the confines of the American youth. ISIS recruitment specialists and leaders know that the American dream may now have more validity in the correlation of one’s social media popularity with personal happiness. They know now of who we are and what we are becoming in terms of identification and validation. In order to defeat this continuous threat of losing our own to the Caliphate, we must redefine the source of appreciation and validation of oneself. These values must be returned to the individual
rather than at the mouse-click of others. We must learn to appreciate one another once more . . .
offline.

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lxxxv
APPENDIX A

1. Seifullah Chapman (formerly Randall Blue Chapman)
2. Hammad Abdur-Raheem

3. Anwar Al-Awlaki
4. Ahmed (left) and Sadequee (right)


5. Russell Defreitas (Court Artist Sketch)


lxxxix
6. Moner Abusalha

facebook.com

7. Moner Abusalha Suicide Bombing Propaganda Video
8. Moner Abusalha Facebook “Islamic Post”
9. Moner Abusalha Remembered on IS Supporter’s T
10. “Alex” Clutching Her Teddy Bear

![Image](http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2015/06/26/world/recruited-mobile/recruited-mobile-facebookJumbo.jpg)

11. “Alex’s” Gifts

![Image](https://static01.nyt.com/images/2015/06/27/world/americas/isis-recruitment-books/isis-recruitment-books-master1650.png)

xciii
12. Usaamah Rahim

https://heavyeditorial.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/ibrahim-rahim-facebook.jpg?quality=65&strip=all&strip=all

13. Example of Facebook Post from Usaamah Rahim

facebook.com
14. Abu Musab al Zarqawi


15. (*GRAPHIC*) The Nick Berg Murder (IS Propaganda Account)

Appendix B

1. Net Pattern Recruitment (RAND)

   ![Figure 5-1: The net.]


2. Seed Crystal Pattern (RAND Corporation)

   ![Figure 5-4: The seed crystal.]

3. Infection Pattern (RAND Corporation)

http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reprints/2006/RAND_RP1214.pdf