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JIHAD 2.0: SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE NEXT EVOLUTION OF TERRORIST RECRUITMENT

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

MAY 7, 2015

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JIHAD 2.0: SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE NEXT EVOLUTION OF TERRORIST RECRUITMENT

THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2015

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:32 a.m., in room SD–342, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Ron Johnson, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Johnson, Portman, Ayotte, Ernst, Sasse, Carper, Booker, and Peters.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN JOHNSON

Chairman JOHNSON. This hearing is called to order.

I am looking at the title of the hearing, "Jihad 2.0: Social Media in the Next Evolution of Terrorist Recruitment." Unfortunately, I think that is a wrong title. It is really the current evolution of terrorist recruitment. We have got a panel of, I think, some excellent witnesses to lay out the reality, which is what we are always trying to do in this Committee. If you are going to solve a problem, you have to first recognize and acknowledge that reality. And so I think we have a good panel.

I would ask consent to enter my written prepared statement into the record,[1] and it is always granted because our Ranking Member is such a kind gentleman.

What I would like to do is talk a little bit about an the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) message that warns of 71 trained soldiers in 15 U.S. States, 23 signed up for missions. I am just going to read some excerpts here because—first of all, let me say we have no knowledge whether this is true or not. I think some of our witnesses will probably say it is bluster. Let us hope so. But this is a perfect example of what ISIS is trying to do and how they are trying to use social media.

And, of course, this is claiming credit for the terrorist attacks in Texas. Excerpts read:

"The attack by the Islamic State (IS) in America is only the beginning of our efforts to establish a province in the heart of our enemy."

"We knew that the target was protected. Our intention was to show how easy we give our lives for the sake of Allah."

[1] The prepared statement of Senator Johnson appears in the Appendix on page 43.

"Out of the 71 trained soldiers, 23 have signed up for missions like Sunday. We are increasing in number."

"Of the 15 States, 5 we will name: Virginia, Maryland, Illinois, California, and Michigan."

"The disbelievers who shot our brothers think that you killed someone untrained. Nay. They gave their bodies in plain view because we were watching."

They go on to say: "The next 6 months will be interesting." Let us hope not.

As I am being briefed for this hearing—and, by the way, the reason we always call these hearings is I have questions. I need to understand what these problems are. So I am always learning a lot, and I am going to learn a lot more through the testimony. But I like timelines, and so I had my staff prepare just for 2015 the timeline of potential terrorist plots that have been foiled, the arrests that have been made of individuals who have been inspired by ISIS and other Islamic terrorists.

If you go through the list, we had Christopher Lee from Cincinnati, Ohio, who was planning to come to the U.S. Capitol to bomb and then, with two semiautomatic weapons, open fire on people fleeing the Capitol. That was on January 14.

February 25, three Brooklyn men were arrested.

March 17, a former U.S. Air Force veteran was arrested after a failed attempt to cross the border into Syria.

March 25, an Army National Guard specialist was arrested after planning to travel to Syria.

April 2, two women were arrested in Queens, New York.

April 3, a Philadelphia woman was arrested before she could travel to Syria.

April 8, this one hits a little bit closer to home because this is a gentleman from Madison, Joshua Ray Van Haften, was arrested in Chicago O'Hare Airport after his flight landed from Turkey.

April 10, John T. Booker was arrested in Topeka after it was discovered he was preparing a car bomb for use against nearby Fort Riley Army post.

April 16, another indictment.

April 19, six men arrested on terrorism charges.

May 3, the Texas terrorist attempt.

We have a chart[1] that I think is also somewhat surprising. So, again, the point of that timeline is these arrests, the revelations of these things are growing, and they are increasing in frequency.

Another I thought relatively shocking as I was being briefed by my staff, I was asking, "Is this true?", that the number of terrorist attacks in 2012 around the world was 6,771, and in 2013, 9,700. And one of my staff members went, "Wow," which was exactly my reaction. In 2012, 11,000 individuals killed in terrorist attacks. It grew by 61 percent to almost 18,000 in 2013.

Now, in this chart we have also broken that out between terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and Pakistan. I guess I would consider those war zones. But that still leaves almost 3,000 terrorist attacks in 2012 outside of those war zones; almost 4,000 in 2013, an increase of about 33.8 percent.

[1] The chart referenced by Senator Johnson appears in the Appendix on page 100.

So the point of this hearing is to show that the danger is real. In many respects, the threat is growing, and we are going to have testimony here that there have actually been some setbacks for ISIS. They are maybe not as strong as they purport to be. But they are using social media to show that they are actually stronger than they are to inspire the kind of action—and they do not need a whole lot of territory. They do not need too many computers. They do not need too many people spewing that hate and providing that kind of inspiration.

So this is a real threat. I really want to thank and welcome the witnesses for your thoughtful testimony and coming here. With that, I will turn it over to our Ranking Member for his opening comments.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CARPER

Senator CARPER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

To each of you, welcome. This is an excellent panel, and we look forward to hearing from you and having a chance to ask questions of you this morning.

As this Committee has discussed at a number of hearings over the years, the threats that our country faces—and the Chairman has just given us sort of a quick look at what is going on this year, but the nature of the threat has evolved significantly since September 11, 2001, when I was a new Member of this Committee.

After 9/11, the most acute terrorist threats came from Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda, which had orchestrated, as we know, large, complex attacks from remote caves in Afghanistan. Today, Bin Laden is dead. The core of al-Qaeda as we knew it has been largely dismantled.

Unfortunately, al-Qaeda affiliates in Yemen, Africa, and Syria have filled the void. At the same time, new terror groups like ISIS present an immediate and different kind of threat to the United States and others both here and abroad.

While the threat of major aviation attacks still remains a top concern for American counterterrorism officials, the tactics employed by these groups who are targeting us have broadened and are not as focused on this particular type of attack method.

Groups like ISIS, Al-Shabaab, and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula have used social media and online propaganda to spread their call to extremists here in America and around the world to carry out their own attacks against us.

Moreover, ISIS has seemingly perfected the ability to use social media to lure Western recruits to Syria for training. These new tactics mean that we can no longer rely solely on our ability to use military force to eliminate a terrorist threat. We must, in partnership with our allies abroad, start examining more closely the root causes of why Westerners join the ranks and act in the name of ISIS or al-Qaeda. We must continue to evolve our own counterterrorism tactics to address these root causes.

Today we will begin to examine the narratives put forward by these terrorist groups over social media and also how those narratives are being used to influence vulnerable individuals here and in other Western countries. And we will look for common-sense solutions that our government, along with other governments with

whom we are allied, can employ to counter these groups' narratives and to eliminate this tool from the terrorists' toolbox.

With that, I look forward to a good conversation, and thank you again for joining us.

Chairman JOHNSON. Thank you, Senator Carper.

It is the tradition of this Committee to swear in witnesses, so if you would all stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear that the testimony you will give before this Committee will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you, God?

Mr. BERGEN. I do.

Mr. BERGER. I do.

Mr. SHAIKH. I do.

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. I do.

Chairman JOHNSON. Thank you. Please be seated.

Our first witness is Peter Bergen. Mr. Bergen is the Director of the National Security Studies Program at the New America Foundation, Cable News Network (CNN's) national security analyst, and the author of "Manhunt: The Ten-Year Search for Bin Laden—from 9/11 to Abbottabad," and "The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict between America and al-Qaeda."

Mr. Bergen.

TESTIMONY OF PETER BERGEN,[1] DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL SECURITY PROGRAM, NEW AMERICA, AND PROFESSOR OF PRACTICE, ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Mr. BERGEN. Thank you, Senator Johnson, Senator Carper, and other Members of the Committee and the excellent staff that put this hearing together. My task today is to kind of try and outline the threat from Americans inspired by the Syrian conflict, which is the newest wave and cohort of domestic jihadism in the United States. And we at the New America Foundation, where I work, have identified 62 individuals from news reports or public records who have tried to join ISIS, have joined ISIS, or Nusra, the al-Qaeda affiliated, or supported others doing so, and here are the sort of big takeaways:

They come from across the United States. We found cases in 19 States. As you know, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Director James Comey has said there are ongoing investigations in 50 States. Some of these are obviously not public yet.

They do not fit any ethnic profile. They are whites or African Americans; they are Arab Americans; they are Pakistani Americans; they are Bosnian Americans. And this, of course, produces problems for law enforcement in the sense that, unlike in the case of Al-Shabaab, which attracted overwhelmingly Somali Americans, mostly from Minnesota—where Senator Johnson went to university, I believe—that was a very focused group who were going. This is across the United States.

We also found an unprecedented number of American females. Obviously these are a group of highly misogynistic individuals whose goal in life is to preclude women from having any role outside the home, and yet we found about a fifth of the 62 are females.

[1] The prepared statement of Mr. Bergen appears in the Appendix on page 45.

A number of them are teenagers, and this is really a very new phenomenon.

We also found that this is a relatively young group. The average age is 25, but there are teenagers, including teenage girls as young as 15.

The only profile that this group really share is that 53 of the 62 individuals were very active on social media, downloading and sharing jihadist propaganda, and in some cases, as Elton Simpson was doing, directly communicating with members of ISIS in Syria.

This is a new development in the way jihadist terrorists are recruiting in the United States. The kind of conventional view or perhaps the cartoonish view is an al-Qaeda recruiter comes here and recruits somebody and creates a cell. In fact, that is very rare. That did happen in Lackawanna. You may remember the Lackawanna Six case where there was an al-Qaeda recruiter who recruited six Yemeni Americans from Buffalo, New York, to go to a training camp in Afghanistan.

We also saw that in Minnesota in 2007 when veterans of the Somali war went to Minneapolis to recruit Americans physically and bring them to Somalia. But we are no longer seeing that model at all. In fact, of the 62 individuals, we found that none of them were physically recruited by a militant operative, radical cleric, returning foreign fighter, or while radicalized while in prison. Instead, they self-recruited online or were sometimes in touch via Twitter with members of ISIS in Syria.

Why would Americans abandon what is, after all, usually a very comfortable life? A lot of these come from comfortable backgrounds and are intelligent individuals. Why would they be attracted to ISIS? And I think there are sort of perhaps three reasons:

First of all, of course, the terrible nature of Assad's brutal war against his own people is an attraction.

Second, the claim that ISIS has created the caliphate, which I think is a powerful attraction for idealistic fundamentalist Muslims.

Third, ISIS is presenting itself as the vanguard of the sort of Muslim army that is signaling the end of times and that is basically the vanguard of a group that will usher in the perfect true Islam when the Mahdi, the savior of Islam, returns.

Now, I this morning I just saw that a very large number of Americans, something like 4 in 10, believe that we are in the end times, so this is not such an uncommon view that we are in the end times. So ISIS is presenting itself as ushering in the end times, which is another powerful kind of attraction.

It also presents itself as a real State with social services, and that claim is not completely false, although it is certainly probably less true than they present it. And for some of the Western recruits, this is a heroic and glamorous thing. We have seen people tweet on ISIS—we have seen ISIS fighters say that it is like playing "Call of Duty but in 3–D," and so there is a heroic, exciting aspect to this that is attracting people.

And, finally, what is the true level of threat? I would say the true level of threat in the West is not as much—something like 80 percent of Americans believe that ISIS is a serious or fairly serious threat to the United States. Well, it is clearly a big threat to Amer-

ican interests in the Middle East, potentially, but so far only one Syrian foreign fighter has carried out a successful attack in the West, which was the Frenchman who attacked the Jewish Museum in Brussels on May 24, 2014, killing four people.

That, of course, does not mean that the threat does not exist. It is worrisome, but not existential. And related to that point, of the 19 individuals we found who went to Syria, 8 of them were killed over there. So Syria is proving as much of a graveyard as a launchpad for attacks.

It is a very dangerous war, as you know. In fact, about half of the men who have gone over there have been killed and a larger sample of about 600 foreign fighters that we have examined, and about 5 percent of the females, so even for the women it is very dangerous.

So if the returning foreign fighters are not the issue, what is the issue? And the issue is really what we saw on Sunday, which is people inspired by ISIS taking up weapons, obviously it is easy to acquire weapons in this country and doing something with them. And, luckily, Sunday's attack did not mature in the way that the attackers wanted it to. But I think that is a harbinger of what we will see in the future. So the real issue is not Syrian foreign fighters coming back to the United States. Law enforcement has done a very good job of tracking these folks. If they come back, there is only one case where law enforcement did not recognize that a particular person had gone to Syria, which is the Floridian, Moner Abu Salha. But the returnee problem is really, I think, much less of an issue than the homegrown ISIS-inspired that we saw on Sunday, and there is very little as a practical matter that we can prevent lone wolves who are truly lone wolves from doing these kinds of attacks.

The good news is there is a natural ceiling to what a lone wolf can do. For instance, in Boston, the two Tsarnaev brothers were lone wolves. They killed four people. Those were individually tragedies, and it was a terrible day for the United States and Boston. But it was not a national catastrophe like 9/11 was. So we have to frame the threat effectively, which is it is worrisome but not existential and nothing on the scale of 9/11.

Chairman JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Bergen.

Our next witness is J.M. Berger. Mr. Berger is a non-resident fellow in the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World at the Brookings Institution and the author of "Jihad Joe: Americans Who Go to War in the Name of Islam" and "ISIS: The State of Terror."

Mr. Berger.

TESTIMONY OF J.M. BERGER,[1] NON-RESIDENT FELLOW, PROJECT ON U.S. RELATIONS WITH THE ISLAMIC WORLD, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

Mr. BERGER. Thank you for having me. I think that I would like to start by talking about the lone wolf threat, because that is obviously on everyone's minds after the events of this weekend.

ISIS in many ways appears to be the first jihadist group to really kind of crack the lone wolf formula. The idea of leaderless resist-

[1] The prepared statement of Mr. Berger appears in the Appendix on page 65.

ance and individual attacks goes back to the 1980s, originated in the American white supremacist movement, and people have been trying to make it work ever since. And the problem with lone wolves is that it is too easy to stay at home, generally. People are not going to get adequately motivated to carry out an attack without having social reinforcement, and that defeats the purpose of being a lone wolf, is to escape detention by not talking to anyone.

ISIS has mixed up this formula, and there are a couple of reasons for this. The first thing that they have done that is different from what al-Qaeda did is they have become the populist movement. So they have a very low threshold for entry, and they are pretty undiscriminating about who they include in their group relative to al-Qaeda. It was very difficult to join al-Qaeda. al-Qaeda was a vanguard and an elitist movement. So that affords them access to more people.

Second, their propaganda is extremely violent, and it is also very focused on presenting the group as dynamic and action-oriented relative—again, when you look at a comparison to al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda's propaganda, in recent years especially, tends more toward discourse: "We are trying to convince people that we have the right idea, that reasonable people would agree with us that this is the correct thing to do." And ISIS does not care about that so much, and they are willing to just get people agitated and cut them loose.

The third element of change is that ISIS has changed sort of the fundamental underlying assumption that we see in the jihadist argument. al-Qaeda proceeded from an assumption of weakness. Its argument was based on the proposition that Muslims are weak and that they were unable to stand up to apostate regimes in the region, and the reason that they could not stand up to them was because the West was behind them. So the idea behind al-Qaeda and the idea behind using terrorism as a tactic was that, "This is the tool of the weak. We have to degrade popular support in the United States for apostate regimes in the Middle East, and then the United States will withdraw its support, and then we will be able to fight these guys directly."

ISIS has skipped ahead to fighting directly. Their propaganda emphasizes this. They are taking the fight to the local regimes, and they are attacking the United States in a secondary way. Their message is that, "We are winners, and you should join us because we are strong."

All of this is part of a very complex set of problems. We are in a period of very broad social change. People have been talking about social media for a number of years and often in very effusive terms about how it is changing the world, and this is the first manifestation of how that really is going to work. What we are seeing is that social media allows people to self-select the beliefs and information that they receive, so if you have an interest in jihadism, you can find other people who are interested in that very easily, very quickly, and you can establish relationships with them. This is very different from, say, the 1950s. If you were a radical jihadist in the 1950s living in Peoria, you might go your whole life without meeting anybody who shared your views. Today it takes you 10 minutes to start talking to people who share your views. And that is a key part of what ISIS does in its recommendation process, it

provides a social context. It is reinforcement, and it is personal validation of your beliefs. If you are going to act out as a lone wolf, they are offering you a degree of fame that you would not be able to achieve as a mass shooter, for instance. And it is very reciprocal.

There is a sense of remote intimacy on social media that can be hard to appreciate if you do not use it a lot. When you talk to somebody on a social media platform and you talk to them every day, you feel like you know them. You feel like they are somebody who is in your life. And so somebody tweeting from Syria who is a member of ISIS can develop a very emotionally powerful relationship with somebody who is sitting in the United States. And that is part of the reason that we have seen people are more willing to mobilize in the name of ISIS than they were in the name of al-Qaeda.

ISIS' radicalization and recruitment practices take place over a spectrum. There is no one thing that they do to try and recruit Westerners or try and recruit locally. They attack this from every channel in every direction using a variety of styles and using a very large number of people, because ISIS is a large organization and can afford to have 2,000 people who tweet 150 times every day. It can afford to have a ratio of, two or three recruiters to every one potential recruit who might carry out a lone wolf attack. If there is an area in which we are trailing ISIS in this struggle, I think it is probably a question of resources. And, of course, the problem that we face with that is that nobody can really agree how to use those resources. Our efforts at countering violent extremism in a preventive way have a lot of problems that are inherent to them, and we also have a problem from a law enforcement perspective. If you are monitoring 60 or 100 people, it takes 500 people to do that, to monitor these people even on a partial basis, let alone 24 hours a day. So if these guys jump in a car and drive to Texas, there is not a lot you can do to interdict that.

I will save most of the rest of my thoughts for the Q&A. I did want to just talk about the prospect of an ISIS organizational terrorist attack. ISIS has money and manpower to spare. We have not seen that they have an intent to carry out a 9/11-style attack, and there is reason to think they might not be as skilled or competent in such an attempt as al-Qaeda was because of the training cycles that they use. I think we should not assume that that is something that could not happen, though, that they could not make an attempt. And I think we are much better prepared to prevent something like that today.

I do not think ISIS is an existential threat, but I do think that we have to have realistic expectations about what they might do so that, when something happens, we do not overreact in fear.

Thank you.

Chairman JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Berger.

Our next witness is Mubin Shaikh. Mr. Shaikh is a former Muslim extremist and an expert on radicalization, terrorism, and countering violent extremism. He has consulted on the topic of ISIS with the U.S. State Department, U.S. National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), Central Command, NATO, Interpol, and other agencies.

First of all, Mr. Shaikh, I certainly appreciate and thank you for having a change of heart after 9/11 and for all the help and support you have given this government in terms of trying to counteract this and also trying to help other young people who might be inspired to not be inspired. But I am looking forward to your testimony. Mr. Shaikh.

TESTIMONY OF MUBIN SHAIKH,[1] AUTHOR, "UNDERCOVER JIHADI"

Mr. SHAIKH. Thank you, sir. Shalom Alaichem, As-salamu alaykum, the greeting of Jesus Christ, peace be unto you.

To the esteemed Members of the Senate Committee, on September 11, 2001, I was driving to work when I first heard a plane had struck one of the two towers of the World Trade Center buildings. Immediately, I exclaimed aloud, "AllahuAkbar"—"God is Great." My celebratory moment was quickly muted when I asked myself: What if the very office building I was working in was similarly struck by a plane? I would have perished along with everyone else just as those innocent people perished on that day. For me and many others, September 11, 2001, was, for all intents and purposes, the beginning of the end of my commitment to the extremist mindset. Allow me to explain how this began for me.

I was born and raised in Toronto, Canada, to Indian immigrants. As a child, I grew up attending a very conservative brand of "Madressah"—a Quran school—an imported version of what you would find in India and Pakistan: rows of boys, separated from the girls, sitting at wooden benches, rocking back and forth, reciting the Quran in Arabic but not understanding a word of what was being read.

Contrast that with my daily life of attending public school, which was the complete opposite of the rigid, fundamentalist manner of education of the Madressah. Here, I could actually talk to girls and have a normal, functional relationship with them. When I left the Quran school at age 12 and moved into middle school and high school, I was not discriminated against, bullied, picked on, or anything of the like. I was actually one of the cool kids.

But when I was 17, I had a house party while my parents were away, which my hyper-conservative uncle walked in on. Normal as it may be to the Western experience, my uncle and other family members were incensed that I would have brought non-Muslim friends to my home, and they spent the next few days berating me over what I had done. Due to the sustained guilt trip I received, the only way I thought I could make amends with my family was to "get religious." Hence, the born-again type seeking to right the wrongs of their past.

I would then travel to India and Pakistan and, in the latter, ended up in a place called Quetta, which, unbeknownst to me at the time, was the center of the Taliban Shura and of the group known as al-Qaeda. As I walked around the area, I chanced upon 10 heavily armed men dressed in black turbans, flowing robes, and sandals. One of them said to me that, "If you truly wish to bring about political change, it can only be done by using this," and he

[1] The prepared statement of Mr. Shaikh appears in the Appendix on page 71.

held aloft his AK47. I was completely enamored by them as jihadi heroes—a consistent theme in Jihadist literature and media today.

In the years following, I absorbed myself in proclaiming the jihad was the only way to change things. And when Osama bin Laden gave his fatwa in 1998, I was on board.

Then 9/11 happened and I thought: Wait a second. I get attacking combatants, but this? Office buildings in which regular people worked—Muslims included? I realized I needed to study the religion of Islam properly to make sense of what I had just witnessed. I sold my belongings and moved to Syria in early 2002 when there was still some semblance of normality in the country. I attended the class of a Syrian Islamic scholar who challenged me on my views regarding jihad and subsequently, spent a year and a half with him studying the verses of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet—Peace Be Upon Him—that the jihadists used to justify their hate and destruction. I came to relinquish my views completely and returned to Canada in 2004 with a new-found appreciation for rights for Muslims in the West.

That year, some individuals had been arrested in the United Kingdom with the London fertilizer bomb plot. One of those individuals was none other than my classmate from the Madressah that I attended as a child. I thought this to be a mistake and contacted the Canadian Security Intelligence Service to give a character reference for the family, but it was too late for him. As for me, I was recruited by the service as an undercover operative because I felt this was my religious duty.

I can say that I conducted several infiltration operations both online and on the ground involving religious extremists. One of those cases moved on to become a criminal investigation, and I traversed from Intelligence Service to the Mounted Police, Integrated National Security Enforcement Team, in what came to be known as the Toronto 18 terrorism prosecution. I gave fact witness testimony in five hearings over 4 years at the Superior Court where 11 individuals were eventually convicted.

I have since worked with various mechanisms of the U.S. Government, as you noted the National Counter Terrorism Center, Homeland Security Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, and the U.S. Department of State, Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications—three main outfits that are engaged in the study and practice of countering violent extremism programming.

In addition, I have spent the past few years on Twitter having watched the very start of the foreign fighter phenomenon and directly observed recruitment and propaganda by ISIS types online, and I reference Appendix A here that the members should have. I have directly engaged with many of them, male and female—Appendix B—as well as some of their victims that they have tried to recruit. My approach is to show how wrong they are and to criticize and delegitimize them from the very Islamic sources that they misquote and mutilate. Thusly, the correct term to describe these Terrorists in Islamic Costume (TICs) is "Khawarij." It is a technical Islamic term.

I have personally intervened in cases of an America girl that these predators were trying to lure away and put a stop to it by

engaging her online as someone who can show her the real interpretation of Islam. Due to this, I believe I have a good understanding of what is happening in terms of recruitment and what needs to be done in terms of countermessaging, both from the civic service and non-governmental organization (NGO) side as well as the military side of psychological operations, which I conveyed at a recent SOCOM conference held in New York in which the Commanding General himself was present.

Finally, there remains a massive gap in all of the areas that I have mentioned and that a sustainable, meaningful, and effective countermessaging approach needs to be created. I submit to you that it is not as hard as some may suggest, that we already have the talent but just need the direction and guidance in order to get it going.

Just three quick points on—there was some question on terrorist recruitment in prisons.

No. 1, terrorist recruitment in prisons is happening all over the world, not just in the United States. But as for the United States, the numbers are actually very low.

No. 2, in the Western context, much of this recruiting remains unseen to the untrained eye—and also due to its covert nature—and usually does not manifest openly in the prison institution but afterwards, when the individual has left the facility.

And, No. 3, greater vetting of the types of imams that offer counseling is needed to ensure that pro-social messaging is delivered in the context of prison rehabilitation programs. By framing this under "pro-social" messaging, the State avoids having to declare which version of Islam they "approve" of since we all approve of anything that promotes healthy, productive, and rehabilitative components of counseling.

I thank the Committee and my colleagues here with me and hope this is the start of a solid discussion in dealing with the challenges and opportunities now before us. Thank you and God bless.

Chairman JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Shaikh.

Our next witness is Daveed Gartenstein-Ross. Am I pronouncing that even close?

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. That is correct.

Chairman JOHNSON. Oh, wow. That is very unusual, by the way. Mr. Gartenstein-Ross is a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of democracies, an adjunct assistant professor in Georgetown University's Security Studies Program, a lecturer at Catholic University of America, and author of the report, "Homegrown Terrorists in the United States and the United Kingdom."

Mr. Gartenstein-Ross.

TESTIMONY OF DAVEED GARTENSTEIN–ROSS,[1] SENIOR FELLOW, FOUNDATION FOR DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. Senator Johnson, Senator Carper, distinguished Members, it is an honor to appear before you today. What I am going to focus on in this testimony is the question of: What has the United States done? What can the United States role be in countering this violent messaging?

With respect to ISIS, which I think right now is rightly at the center of our concerns, we have seen the most dramatic brand rise of any jihadist organization, in large part because of the reasons that J.M. Berger lays out, that they are excellent at messaging. Technically they go far beyond what al-Qaeda and others have done, and they take advantage of Web 2.0, the interactivity of the Internet, which suddenly makes someone who is alone a part of a group. They also are vulnerable, though it is not inevitable, to the most dramatic brand reversal of any jihadist organization we have seen.

You might have noticed that at times IS' messaging and the United States' countermessaging have been exactly the same. Often the United States will show the Islamic State's brutality, people that they are killing, people that they have tortured; and the Islamic State proudly proclaims the same thing. The reason why is what they have fundamentally is a winner's messaging.

To them, it is not bad to show that they are brutal because the brutality shows that they are stronger than other groups, that they can impose their will. They are actually very recently—as the Islamic State has increasing pressure on it, particularly being concerned about the pressure being put on Mosul, a statement by a supporter named Abu Sulayman al-Jahbadhi, which was very insightful, asked people in Islamic State-held cities not to show the brutality of the Islamic State's enemies, not to show, for example, bombing that killed civilians, not to show the impact of a siege upon the cities. His argument was that the Islamic State in its messaging will show the brutality of its foes, but that brutality is always connected to punishment. In other words, they want to show that they can deal with their problems. That is what a winner's messaging is. They emphasize their strength. They do not want to emphasize weakness.

Now, the reason why we know that they are vulnerable to a brand reversal is because we have seen that before with the exact same organization. Back in 2005 to 2006, you had a very similar dynamic, not identical but very similar, with al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which is, of course, ISIS' predecessor. al-Qaeda in Iraq was known for its brutality. It shocked people with videos where it beheaded its victims. And it was thought of as a very romantic organization. People wondered during this period if the emir of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, had surpassed Osama bin Laden as the leading figure of the jihadist world.

But what happened then? We remember, of course, from Iraq in the 2007–09 period that they had overplayed their hand, particularly in Anbar Province, where right now ISIS is in the process of inflicting similar although greater brutality upon the population.

[1] The prepared statement of Mr. Gartenstein-Ross appears in the Appendix on page 89.

You saw a grassroots uprising known as "The Awakening" or the "Sahwa movement," combined with two other factors: a surge of U.S. troops in Iraq and also U.S. counterinsurgency tactics. This ended up defeating al-Qaeda in Iraq at the time. Their brand went from being sky high to suddenly the entire al-Qaeda organization wondering what they could do to undo the brand damage that had been done by their losses in Iraq. This was a brand reversal because what had once been a symbol of strength, their brutality, was reversed into a symbol of having overplayed their hand and turned the population against them.

Now, with respect to ISIS, it is experiencing a trajectory of losses. It has been in somewhat of a decline phase since October of last year. It has lost territory rather than gaining it, and as a result, ISIS has started to emphasize other ways in which they are strong. One particular way has been their expansion into Africa, which very clearly is at the center of their current strategy.

At times, they have exaggerated their gains, and they have gotten the media to report on this. I think the best example is their claim to control the city of Derna in northern Libya. This is not true, and it has never been true, but they have gotten the media to report it through multiple outlets, including the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and CNN. The reason why is they were able to show a photo of an Islamic State flag on a government building in Derna, and they were able to also show a video of a parade through Derna with Islamic State supporters.

Now, this is a city that is controlled by multiple factions, so the fact that they could have a show of force or a flag on a government building is not determinative. It does not mean that they control the city. But this was reported, and you have this cycle in which the Islamic State pushes out its message; its message goes to the media, and it goes to it supporters. And, unfortunately, sometimes the media pushes the same message to the supporters. So rather than cognitive dissonance and them having to convince themselves that the Islamic State's message is true and the objective media is wrong, instead both are reporting on these exaggerations. And ISIS is able to do this in areas where social media's penetration is low, so it seems that the facts they are putting forward are the only relevant facts.

Now, what can the United States do? How can the United States reverse this messaging of strength?

One thing that we have to fundamentally be able to do is to compete at the speed of social media. You are all in government. You understand that our bureaucratic processes would often be hard pressed to compete at the speed of the Gutenberg Bible, let alone at the speed of social media. We need to de-bureaucratize the process of competing with them.

I think in this particular case, dealing with the Islamic State is very different than dealing with jihadist messaging as a whole because, as I have outlined, it has a particular vulnerability that other jihadist groups do not necessarily have.

But in this case, what would be very effective is a small cell that is able to operate, that fuses intelligence analysts, those who are able to see what is the Islamic State's messaging, what are they hoping to gain, and where does it not map with reality, with stra-

tegic communications professionals. The U.S. Government is not always the best voice. Often the best voice may be to push information out to media—fact sheets, selectively declassifying information, and giving them information where they can serve as the objective voice if you get them reliable information.

Right now, I know from interactions with media that this is often not being done. When I point to an exaggeration of the Islamic State's, often journalists, whether print or broadcast, are hearing it from me for the first time, as opposed to hearing it from the U.S. Government. Given that media and the battle of perception is so central to what the Islamic State is trying to do, the U.S. Government has to be more quick to react and to understand the strength of its messaging, and to be able to respond at the same kind of speed, focusing in on the key message of the Islamic State at the same speed at which they can push out their own message.

Overall, defeating the Islamic State's messaging does not defeat jihadism, but this is an important point for a variety of reasons. And, furthermore, I can say, to end on an optimistic note, that I do see some promising signs within government that we are starting to shift toward a paradigm of trying to defuse the perception of the Islamic State's strength, but it is worth following up to make sure that we are taking the appropriate steps, and there the Senate I think can play a major role.

Thank you all.

Chairman JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Gartenstein-Ross. We may not have that rapid communication response capability in the Federal Government, but I can tell you, I think most elected officials who have gone through a campaign, particularly Presidential campaigns, have that within the political world, that rapid response. Maybe that would be a good little piece of legislation we could propose a rapid response communication team that we can pull from campaigns. Trust me, we have those capable individuals within our knowledge base.

I would like to talk about the online process. I would like to ask a question. ISIS is using social media to connect and to talk—and, by the way, I would like to enter into the record, without objection, the Web pages provided by Mr. Shaikh.[1] If you have not read them, read them. It is pretty powerful in terms of the examples of how ISIS is using social media.

Chairman JOHNSON. But what is the next step after that? Mr. Berger, who is an expert on this; so they recruit, they talk, they talk online, and then what happens?

Mr. BERGER. So there is a series of stages that you go through with this. Typically somebody is exposed to their propaganda that is being broadcast out, and they take an interest in this. And this is not just ISIS. This is how social media works generally. You find a subject, you take an interest in it, and when you start following it online, you see that there are other people talking about the same subject, and you start conversing with them.

So what we will typically see is that there will be a period where somebody is consuming this stuff in the public, and if somebody is seriously interested and willing to take a step further or consider

[1] The information submitted by Mr. Shaikh appears in the Appendix on page 85.

a step further, they will take it to a private format. So that can be a direct message on Twitter, which cannot be read in the open source, or on Facebook. More often, they will go through an encrypted app, such as WhatsApp or Kik, which it is basically text messaging with an element of encryption.

Chairman JOHNSON. So, again, our authorities can follow the open-source social media, but the minute those individuals who are really serious about it go offline, we go dark. We lose our capability to follow, and we really have no idea. Isn't that basically correct?

Mr. BERGER. Well, you can approach it with subpoena and other authorities, so, I mean, it is possible to get there.

Chairman JOHNSON. If we can decrypt.

Mr. BERGER. Yes.

Chairman JOHNSON. I mean, that is part of the problem.

Mr. BERGER. Yes.

Chairman JOHNSON. And, obviously, Silicon Valley is resistant to allowing us to decrypt, and even if they were to allow it, there would be other sites offshore that will also encrypt. So we are losing our capability of being able to follow this, correct?

Mr. BERGER. Yes. I would also just add, though, that the ability of government to follow it on open social media is often murky.

Chairman JOHNSON. Very limited.

Mr. BERGER. People in different agencies have different understandings of what they are legally allowed to do when it comes to monitoring communications of Americans, even on open social media platforms, and that is somewhere where a governmentwide initiative to clarify authorities would be very helpful.

Chairman JOHNSON. It was not in your testimony, but in my prep, apparently you have a publication where your best guess was there were 46,000—I think these were your words—"overt ISIS supporter accounts" on Twitter, maybe a high number of 90,000. Can you describe what you are talking about by an "overt ISIS supporter account"?

Mr. BERGER. Sure. That figure was from late last year, so it is much smaller now, significantly smaller.

Chairman JOHNSON. Now, why is that?

Mr. BERGER. Because Twitter has started aggressively suspending accounts. So an overt ISIS supporter, for the criteria we used for the paper, was we had a series of steps. So, first, if you are just tweeting ISIS propaganda and "I love ISIS" all day long, then you are an ISIS supporter. If you are not doing that in an obvious way, then we looked at who you followed and then who followed you and sort of analyzed the network to try and see if there was a clear case. So it was a very conservative approach to coding somebody as a supporter. Fundamentally, it is somebody who is not actively trying to conceal their interest in ISIS.

Chairman JOHNSON. So, Mr. Shaikh, as somebody who is trying to prevent young girls, for example, or other people that are making those connections, where are they going now then? Is there an alternative?

Mr. SHAIKH. Well, they will remain in the orbit of their particular networks. What I try to do is engage them openly and directly online. I have seen others try to do that as well. In fact, you are seeing people even on the al-Qaeda side, strangely, arguing

against ISIS types, making theological arguments, which is kind of strange, considering they are al-Qaeda.

But they will continue to orbit their networks. Those that do go off into the WhatsApp and Kik, I do not follow them offline into that, but that is what they do.

Chairman JOHNSON. There are officials of the U.S. Government going into Muslim communities, talking, and one of the reports we got back—and I was very surprised to hear this because of the revelations of Edward Snowden, there seems to be a perception in America that the Federal Government knows all and we have perfect knowledge and we know exactly who is online and we know exactly who is on these sites and is becoming radicalized. And the members of those communities were actually very surprised that we had no idea.

Can you kind of speak to that, Mr. Shaikh, in terms of, the necessity of members of different communities to be policing themselves and reporting that? From the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), it is, "If you see something, say something."

Mr. SHAIKH. I think Hollywood has kind of done this as well, that is, given the idea that the intelligence services are omnipresent and all-knowing. Maybe in some cases, that is a good thing that people think that we can see everything. Of course, on the other hand, this is something that the government agencies are trying to achieve, get into the communities and give them something by which they can actually convince their own communities outside of law enforcement, and, look, these are things that you need to watch for. These are your kids being lured over by these individuals. These are your parents that are going to end up in front of, TV cameras as they attend court or whatever it is. These are your mosques that are going to see press and retaliatory attacks and things like that.

So it is an ongoing challenge with the communities. There is a level of mistrust, and there are professional naysayers, community organizations that are trying to obstruct and are very obstructionist in the way they approach this. But this is an issue that is continuing, continues to play out.

Chairman JOHNSON. My final question really springs from a very interesting article written by Graeme Wood in the Atlantic and really I think amplified by your testimony, the significance of the territory held and the caliphate established and how that is driving the process, driving the narrative. Perhaps you would like to speak to that, Mr. Bergen.

Mr. BERGEN. I think the short answer is that is completely true. Without the territory, the claim to be the caliphate, if you do not control a population—they control about 8 to 9 million people. That is the population of Switzerland. If you do not control territory—it is the size of the United Kingdom roughly—your claim to be the caliphate disappears, which has, an important strategic implication, which is we need to keep chipping away or demolishing this caliphate.

Chairman JOHNSON. But, again, what does that inspire in the minds and hearts of followers? What is the call? What is required once the caliphate is established?

Mr. BERGEN. Well, I think the call—and this is where it gets complicated, and it goes a little bit to what Mubin was talking about. For some highly observant, ultra-fundamentalist Muslims, they may feel, "Hey, I want to go and just be supportive. That does not necessarily mean I want to go and become a fighter for ISIS."

And so I think as a matter for the law enforcement community and the Congress to think about, if somebody is not actually indicted for a potential act of terrorism but merely for trying to go to Syria, we should be thinking about off ramps that are not 15 years in prison, because right now the problem that Muslim families have is if they see a son or daughter radicalizing and then they say, "Well, should we call the FBI?" well, then, that son or daughter may get 15 years in prison.

So I think we should think about—oh, and in Minneapolis, as you know, sir, there is a case where something other than a very long term prison term for a 19-year-old young man is now in process, and I think it is a model we should be thinking about going forward.

Chairman JOHNSON. Before I turn it over to the Ranking Member, anybody else want to respond to that?

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. I think that this also speaks to what Mubin had mentioned, which is the debate between al-Qaeda and ISIS supporters online. The reason why al-Qaeda had never declared a caliphate is because they did not think that they could create something that would have staying power. So if the caliphate gets chipped away geographically, you will see many more people within jihadist circles attacking the decision to declare the caliphate in the first place, which is one reason why, as I said, they are susceptible to a brand reversal, because jihadists themselves would turn on them if they start to lose the territorial advantage.

As to your question about what is required, for someone who believes that the caliphate has been legitimately declared, if they do not accept the caliphate's authority, then they die in a state of sin. This also gets to one of the intra-jihadist debates as to whether it is a legitimate caliphate. But for people who support it, as was outlined, it can be anything from going over there and living in the caliphate—and that certainly is a pull—to, for those who are not able to do so or those who are more well situated to carry out attacks, doing so on the homefront. That is also one reason they have been so successful compared to other organizations in having a prompt to action. They have a lot of things going for them right now that make them acting essentially from a position of strength, and within their very small target audience, from a position of religious legitimacy.

Chairman JOHNSON. So one of the goals of U.S. policy should be to deny them that territory, deny them that caliphate.

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. I think so, yes, and also to make sure that those losses are being broadcast, because it has a magnifying effect, and being broadcast from multiple actors, including civil society activists. Essentially as we improve our communications capabilities, one thing it does is allows those who are opposed to ISIS to have a better vehicle to attack ISIS with.

Chairman JOHNSON. Thank you. I apologize to the Committee Members for going over time. I thought that was important. Senator Carper.

Senator CARPER. Again, thank you. Thank you all for your testimony and for your responses to our questions.

Mr. Berger, I think you used the word "murky" in your comments to describe, I think, the authority with which our officials have to do certain actions. Go back and just mention this again. Let us revisit this for a moment.

Mr. BERGER. Well, fundamentally, I do not think there is a consensus in government that you can do large-scale monitoring of social media, open social media, of American citizens without a probable cause to investigate. So the role that we see in social media, in a lot of cases we have seen some plots and people intending to travel who were detected on social media. More often what we see is social media provides an evidence trail to go after an arrest after you have identified a suspect.

Fundamentally, for instance, there are questions about how we collect and archive this data and who we collect and archive on it. Do we need to have a reason to go after it, or can we sweep up thousands and thousands of accounts?

In the case of Garland, for instance, if we had been sweeping up those accounts, we would have a much clearer idea of the track of radicalization for the suspect on open source. You can go after the stuff with subpoenas. You can try and retrieve the data in various ways. But when Twitter suspends an account and when other platforms suspend an account, that information is no longer available. So this user had previous accounts, seven previous accounts, and we do not have that available to us in the open source to talk about that. And I do not know if law enforcement has that available, if they have been archiving it, if they have access to it via subpoena. I am not entirely sure Twitter saves the data. I am pretty sure they do, but I am not entirely sure.

So these are the kind of questions—I think the appetite in the country probably is not very friendly to the idea that the FBI should be vacuuming up thousands and thousands and thousands of social media accountable. So these are the kinds of things I think that are in play.

And then when you go from agency to agency, there are different kinds of boundary issues that we have run into over the course of some years. I mean, several years ago, there were issues in terms of like military investigating Americans who were in al-Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, military intelligence sometimes had to take names out of documents because the privileges that we afford American citizens in different contexts are sometimes not totally clear how you reconcile that with a pragmatic approach.

Senator CARPER. OK. Thank you.

A related question, and this would really be, I think, for Mr. Gartenstein-Ross and, again, for Mr. Berger. Is it more advantageous, do you think, for us and our government to work with companies to shut down social media accounts that promote ISIS or like-minded messaging or to keep those accounts open for intelligence purposes? Mr. Gartenstein-Ross.

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. Well, J.M. has actually done some very good work on the——

Senator CARPER. J.M. Berger.

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. Yes, J.M. here. J.M. Berger has done some very good work on showing the disruptive impact that it has. There is a very big debate amongst analysts as to whether you shut these accounts down because, on the one hand, you have their ability to radicalize people to action. On the other hand, you have the ability to gather information on them.

I think increasingly that debate is actually becoming settled because we can see with ISIS the massive impact that these accounts have had. The amount of people who have been drawn to the Syria-Iraq theater is greater already than it was during the Afghan-Soviet war in terms of the number of foreign fighters who have come. Social media plays a very big part in that.

So I think, in general, it is advantageous to shut these accounts down, and this is something that should absolutely be a company's decision. The U.S. Government has no authority to do that—with one exception, which is that if jihadists get frustrated with having their accounts suspended on Twitter, Facebook, et cetera, they may create their own website, their own version of Twitter or Facebook, at which point our superiority in terms of technological capabilities plays a role. That is the kind of site that we could shut down wholesale, I think, without any sort of free speech or constitutional problems.

Senator CARPER. Thank you.

Mr. Berger, again, very briefly on this question. Then I have one more.

Mr. BERGER. I do think there is utility in shutting them down. The intelligence argument is important, but ultimately the goal of intelligence is to stop terrorists from doing whatever they want to us, and so, you take that into the context of an attack, obviously you get a lot of intelligence if the terrorist successfully carries out an attack. In the same way in a lower scale I think that, we should not give them carte blanche to do whatever they want because it allows us to make nice charts and spread sheets.

Senator CARPER. OK, thanks. And this would be a question for all of our panelists. I like to focus, as my colleague said, on root causes, not just on addressing symptoms but addressing the underlying root causes. What are the root causes or underlying causes that compel Americans to engage in violence in the name of jihad? And what common factors, if any, do these individuals share? Mr. Bergen.

Mr. BERGEN. That is a tough one. I have looked at hundreds of cases of Americans who have been drawn to jihadi activity and, there is no ethnic profile, there is no—some of these people are—on average, they tend to be slightly better educated than most Americans. They tend to not—but then, on the other hand, you have people from criminal backgrounds. It is very hard to make a one-size-fits-all description. In another era, in the 1970s, perhaps these people might have been drawn to the Weather Underground or the Black Panthers or some other revolutionary utopian movement, the promise to remake society through violence, and we have seen that throughout history.

But there is no really good answer to that question. It is a form of the question of what draws people to crime. The answer is too complicated to say in a very quick and sound-bite kind of way.

Senator CARPER. All right. Thank you. Mr. Berger.

Mr. BERGER. I would agree with that. I think that what we see here, there are clusters of causality. So you can see, for instance, in the Al-Shabaab's recruiting in Minnesota, you can sort of quantify why that happened, why there were so many from Minnesota. You can look at towns, for instance, Derna, where an organization has a long history that, gives you some insight into why that group of people goes. But when you look to sort of generalize, it is very difficult. Who you know is probably the most important thing, and that is where the social media comes in. If you can know somebody in ISIS very easily online, then that presents a greater risk.

Senator CARPER. Thank you.

Mubin Shaikh and then Mr. Gartenstein-Ross, and then I will yield my time. Thanks.

Mr. SHAIKH. Of course, I share the same caveats of the complexity, but I will give a sound-bite version. Without grievances, ideology does not resonate. And without ideology, grievances are not acted on. I think the intersect between ideology and grievances do play a significant role in this.

Senator CARPER. All right. Thank you.

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. I think Mubin articulated it very well, and let me focus on one thing related to this question, which is, What can the United States do?

Senator CARPER. That is always a good question.

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. We are in the world right now where ideas catch on much faster, whether they are good ideas or bad ideas. It is easier to achieve a critical mass, and that can play off of, as Mubin says, grievances and ideology that intersect together.

The question is: What are we doing to ameliorate grievances? To some extent, that is hard. We live in a world that does not have perfect justice at all, and we live in a world of finite resources, and we live in a world of competition. But if you look at what companies are doing—that is, corporations in the United States—those who are prospering are increasingly transparent in terms of their decisionmaking, in terms of what they are doing. The companies that are much more legacy industry-type companies and floundering are less transparent, much more top heavy. In many ways, the U.S. Government looks like a legacy industry.

I think one thing we need to be able to do—there are many representatives who are good at this—is be much more transparent in terms of the U.S.' decisionmaking. There are a lot of hard choices to make.

J.M. Berger outlined before the hard decision in terms of monitoring Americans' use of social media. On the one hand, we understand that people who are on Twitter and radicalizing can pose a danger; but, on the other hand, when we think of the FBI sweeping up thousands and thousands of accounts and archiving them forever, that in many ways feels like "1984" by George Orwell.

So thinking these through publicly, explaining decisions, explaining what we are doing I think can also help to defuse part of that grievance, because moving forward, we are in a world where griev-

ances, whether real or imagined, can catch on very quickly, and the United States should think of what it can do in this evolving structure of communication to minimize the United States being a target.

Senator CARPER. Good. Thank you all.

Chairman JOHNSON. Thank you, Senator Carper.

By the way, I was handed a note, our vote that was scheduled at 10:30 has been moved to 2, so we will not have any interruptions. Senator Sasse.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR SASSE

Senator SASSE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to all of you for being here.

After reading your testimony, my main line of questioning was going to be about how you create strategic brand damage to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and to future jihadi groups. But before we go there, I would like to have a detour and follow, Dr. Gartenstein-Ross, your comments about the interplay between traditional and social media, and obviously the media cycles of people wanting to make news today on social media to be picked up by producers on traditional media. Could you unpack a little bit more your Derna comments, please?

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. Yes, absolutely. Derna was a case in which you did not have much social media penetration, so right away, when you look at what is being broadcast out of Derna, ISIS essentially started out with information dominance. That is because reporters really could not get into Derna to fact check. We actually have had two different sets of reporters who ventured into Derna late last year. Both of these sets of reporters, Tunisians and Libyans, have gotten executed within the past couple of weeks. Not a good place to do fact checking.

And so when they have this information about what is happening and they are pushing it out, and others are not pushing out on social media, the way the news cycle works now, here is information, and there is no competing information, and maybe you will check with a few sources. But media moves much quicker than it did. It has much less fact checking, and so it is easier to get an invented fact out there and then to have it widely repeated, which I think is exactly what happened in Derna.

Senator SASSE. Dr. Bergen, this is not to put you on the spot because I do not know how CNN covered the issue, but could you walk us through how decisions in a circumstance like that are made?

Mr. BERGEN. Yes, I am not familiar enough with CNN's reporting on that. As a general matter, CNN has a very careful fact-checking process.

Senator SASSE. But you do not know if you all reported that ISIS had taken Derna?

Mr. BERGEN. I am not here to comment on CNN's reporting on that.

Senator SASSE. OK. Dr. Gartenstein-Ross, one of the things that is unique about ISIL versus al-Qaeda in Iraq previously is obviously a more decentralized network structure as opposed to a more top-down structure. Obviously, that creates unique opportunities

for them to capture entrepreneurial activity on social media. At the same time, it seems harder for them to control their brand. So they have a deficit in terms of trying to have a territorial claim with the caliphate, but to the degree that they have a more decentralized structure and can exploit social media over time, do you think that means that their brand becomes defuse? Or if they can suffer losses because they will eventually suffer territorial losses, what does that do to their larger social media strategy?

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. So I would conceptualize them as having both a centralized and also decentralized structure. On the one hand, they have a bureaucratic system. They have systems of governance. They have official accounts. Then you have the vast number of people who are fighters who are tweeting from the battlefield, and they have put directives in place—it is actually very clear—to try to rein some of these guys in. But at the end of the day, when you have a large number of people who are on Twitter, it is difficult to fully control your message. That is something that the U.S. military also grapples with as well, and just like ISIS, we have directives, although we have an easier job of reining our guys in, obviously.

With respect to ISIS' brand, I think that it has a trajectory of its brand overall that is being affected by people at multiple layers, those who are at the center of its communications apparatus and those who are on the fringes. And so the answer is yes, it absolutely has more difficulty controlling its brand, and especially because—I referenced before the statement by al-Jahbadhi, the supporter of ISIS who is trying to say, OK, do not broadcast the enemy's atrocities, do not broadcast how hard life is in cities that are under siege; only broadcast strength. If you look at my argument that theirs is a winner's message, that is a very hard message to enforce when that is not actually what is going on, because you do not just have ISIS fighters; you also have people who are living in these cities, and you can see that some resistance movements have sprung up. They are going to have a hard time keeping their message the same. Just like we have trouble controlling them on social media, they are increasingly—as they are entrenched as a governing force and a failing governing force, they are having the same trouble. Suddenly, they are the counterinsurgents, and they are experiencing something like insurgent activity. Now, I do not want to overstate the dissension within the ranks, but you clearly have it. And they have had this for a while. It is just that it is increasing now.

Senator SASSE. Mr. Shaikh, I would be interested in your thoughts on that question.

Mr. SHAIKH. Thank you, sir. Yes, of course, I agree very much, with what Daveed was saying. I think we need to continue to amplify the mistakes they make, the weakness in the ranks, the dissension in the ranks, especially when it comes to educating potential recruits, individuals, teenagers who may want to travel. In the beginning, when a lot of this began, there was a concept called "five-star jihad" where they were putting out—they had taken over some guy's villa, and they were swimming in a nice pool in the back, and they were saying, "Hey, come on down." And for a while I actually took a lot of screen grabs of food pictures that they had

posted. We had Swedish Gummi Bears from Swedish jihadis. We had guys posting kebabs, "Yes, we got that," or a mango milk shake and saying, "How could I not take a picture of that?" Or, the epitome of an identity crisis where you have a Pakistani ethnicity U.K. resident living in Syria, referring to pizza as "home-cooked food."

So I think to educate people just by using their own mistakes, their own failings, this is another way in which we can achieve our objective.

Senator SASSE. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman JOHNSON. Thank you, Senator Sasse.

Senator Peters.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR PETERS

Senator PETERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the panelists for your testimony today.

I wanted to explore a little bit more in depth about some of the countermessaging that we need to do, particularly with the broader Muslim community here in the United States. I think it is important to remember when we are talking about folks who are engaged in these activities with extremism, it is just a tiny sliver of the Muslim community here in the United States. I have a very large Middle Eastern population in Michigan, one of the largest Middle Eastern populations outside the Middle East, as you know, in my community. And it certainly is an opportunity for us to harness that community, which is strongly opposed to ISIS and other extremist groups. In fact, there are regular protests against the activities of ISIS as a perversion of Islam and not reflective of the broader Muslim community. Folks want to be engaged in that countermessaging, which I think ultimately is the way you try to de-legitimize the ideology associated with it.

I know the White House has made this type of outreach a priority with their "Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism" efforts. It was also part of the summit on Countering Violent Extremism this year at the White House Summit. But a 2013 RAND Corporation report highlights challenges to countering violent extremism online, including alienation and lack of trust in the United States approach to counterterrorism among American Muslims as well as the oversecuritized approach to government engagement with the Muslim community.

I have heard from some of my constituents who are concerned about pushing back sometimes against this violent extremism and these lies online because they think it might draw some undue attention to them personally as they engage, even though these are anti-messaging that they are doing. Some of them have also experienced racial profiling, other activities at airports because of their Muslim heritage, and so have certainly some level of distrust when it comes to the law enforcement activities, and yet this is an incredible opportunity for us to use patriotic Americans, Muslim Americans, who live here in our country.

If the panel could address a little bit, how can we engage this community? What would you suggest? What are the messages that will be important? Perhaps, Mr. Shaikh, you have dealt with this,

and we can start with you. But others who would like to weigh in, I would certainly like to have other comments as well.

Mr. SHAIKH. Thank you very much. I am actually doing my Ph.D. in psychology, and I am looking at community interveners and what works in intervention programs. And there is this, I call them, "professional obstructionists," community organizations who—I mean, they are hyper-defensive. They really mistrust the government, and have portrayed any kind of even meaningful, sincere interactions between law enforcement and the community as just an excuse to intelligence-gather. So given that level of mistrust how can we do it? And I think there is a way to do it.

First and foremost, the Muslim community understands—as you have observed, the Muslim community does not want anything to do with ISIS, and really, if you look at the tens of millions of Muslims that are living in Europe and North America in total, we have a maximum amount of 5,000 Western foreign fighters. That is a very small number of people.

So I think first and foremost, the Muslim community needs to understand that it affects us first and foremost, I think. I mean, ISIS kills more Muslims than non-Muslims. And when they do what they do, it is the Muslim community that feels the retaliation, the discrimination, the marginalization. So it is a responsibility I think it is on behalf of the religion. I mean, we have a duty to speak up and give the correct understanding of the religion, lead by example.

And there is a way to still work with law enforcement, but at the same time keep them at arm's length, and that is, to use programming that is developed in-house, in the communities, where the law enforcement agencies understand what the communities are using so that they can back up and say, yes, we understand that they have this, identifying vulnerable persons guide, let us say, and we understand that they have a mechanism in place where they can give rehabilitative programming without it necessarily being a top-down approach.

And, just last, I mean, of course, people have their views, free speech, of course, but we have to be very careful not to perpetuate the ISIS ideology, which is Islam is to blame, because if we do that and we say that, yes, Muslims are terrorists and Islam is all about terrorism, that is exactly what ISIS says. In fact, I have seen that you have people who are very anti-Muslim, they even use the exact same verses of the Quran that ISIS uses. And if you did not see the name, you would swear that it was an ISIS account doing the promoting.

So I think there are multiple layers to this, and it can be done, but it needs solid direction, I think, and community leadership.

Senator PETERS. And direction from within the community.

Mr. SHAIKH. Within the community, yes.

Senator PETERS. It is an organic process.

Mr. SHAIKH. Yes.

Senator PETERS. But also in that process, law enforcement here in the United States understands to let the community lead and back it up and to back off, if I am rephrasing what you said accurately.

Mr. SHAIKH. Yes, just a closing point on this. Local police I think are best suited for this because the local police are the ones who will respond if somebody throws a rock through the mosque or if there is a crime that happens in the community. They are not seen as investigating terrorism like the FBI might be. The FBI will have big problems in dealing with them at that level.

So there is a way to develop those relationships, and it needs to be done.

Senator PETERS. Thank you.

Does anybody else want to add to that?

Mr. BERGEN. Just to give a couple of specific examples about some of the things Mubin is talking about. We cannot take down all bad speech, even though that is desirable, but we can also help reinforce better speech. So two examples:

Rabia Chaudry is a Maryland-based Muslim American lawyer who goes around the country training Muslim American leaders and imams, many of whom do not really understand how the Internet works, about how to use it themselves, Google rankings and these kinds of things. So that is one very concrete thing. It is very hard to measure countering violent extremism. The success is where nothing happens. But this I think is an example of something that is concrete and working.

Another is a woman called Nadia Oweidat, who is a D.Phil. from Oxford, who is aggregating all satirical content about ISIS in Arabic online, because satire is a very powerful weapon against this kind of group.

And, finally, for the U.S. Government, the U.S. Government cannot engage in any kind of theological debate for all sorts of obvious reasons, but the message that U.S. Government officials should constantly say is, "This group positions itself as the defender of Islam, but its victims are overwhelmingly Muslim." It is a factually correct statement that requires no special knowledge of Islam, and I think it is a powerfully undercutting message for what this group is trying to say about themselves to the Muslim world.

Senator PETERS. Thank you. I am out of time.

Chairman JOHNSON. Thank you, Senator Peters. Senator Booker.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR BOOKER

Senator BOOKER. I want to jump right in. I have to say, in preparing for this hearing, I was surprised if not stunned at how we are approaching our messaging and our countermessaging, frankly. I find that there are about 2.9 million Muslims living in the United States, and half of them are under 30. We are talking about a very young population.

Now, I agree with Senator Peters, the overwhelming 99-point-whatever percent are good young people that reflect the rest of the population. But we are dealing with a population of young people that are online and engaged in an extraordinary manner. And in the Middle East, you have an even greater percentage of people that are under 30 years old, and the new form of communication is social media. Ninety percent of Americans aged 18 to 29 use social media. Nine in 10 18- to 29-year-olds watch online video, and almost half of them, that is where they get their news.

And I know a little bit about social media, I have to say, and when I started going around to the sites that we have in our various agencies—DHS, National Counterterrorism Center, State Department—I was shocked at our countermessaging.

I want to pass this iPad around to my colleagues, and support two things to take note of. There are two tabs at the top, and you can toggle between them. One is a YouTube video, and there are hundreds of hours going up every minute on YouTube. The videos that ISIS is producing are incredibly slick, fancy, and attractive. Here on this video are terrorists giving out things to kids and sharing and the like.[1]

If you toggle back over, here is the "Think Again Turn Away" website by the Department of State. If you know anything about social media, one of the things you should look at is the engagement of people on our social media feeds, the engagement here is laughable—three retweets, two retweets.

Now, if you think about this, last year, or fiscal year (FY) 2013 we spent $196 million on Voice of America. This is old-school media. It is radio and the like. And, Mr. Gartenstein-Ross, maybe you know, how much money are we investing and appropriating for social media countermessaging?

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. They do not specifically budget out social media separately, but it is clear that it is a small percentage of what is being done. And, further, as you point out, a lot of times what we push out via social media is very crude.

Senator BOOKER. I mean "crude" is a generous statement. You said a wonderful phrase. You said, "We need to compete at the speed of social media. Mr. Bergen, you said in your written testimony that the one thing that unifies these folks is their age and that they are online. And you would think that if this is one of the threats, and we have asked counterterrorism experts from the United States, what is their biggest concern, it is domestic lone wolf individuals. Online in social media is where the majority of them are getting radicalized. If we have an inadequate response to that, it is very frustrating.

Now, Mr. Shaikh your work is incredible. I see you online trying to push back on this. There are easy tactics—I know them, as you said, from politics—for how to get more voice and virality to messaging. We are not using these tactics as government to get countermessages out there. The data that you are presenting regarding Muslims killing Muslims, and ISIS is a group that is killing more Muslims, shows they get their memes to go more viral. Look at their fancy memes and our lack of compelling contact.

And so I just want to start with Mr. Shaikh. It looks like to me that you are trying to do countermessaging, but we have a government that is spending millions and millions of dollars on old-school forms of media, and as you said, Mr. Gartenstein-Ross, very crude social media efforts. What do you imagine could be done if we were to do an effective social media online countermessaging effort?

Mr. SHAIKH. Thank you very much. In some kind of defense to the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, they have a very small group of people. They are trying to contest this

[1] The information submitted by Senator Booker appears in the Appendix on page 101.

space, and they are trying to do something. And I get that. And yes, "crude" is a very polite statement.

Look, at the end of the day, if you want to fight back against recruitment of 15-year-old kids, you need to work with 15-year-old kids. When I see my own kids showing examples of what affects them and what motivates them and what resonates with them, it tells me that this is exactly what you need to do. Talk to the kids. They can do a really good job.

With respect to producing material, one of the comments that I said was, I mean, really I feel that it is unacceptable, especially given—I mean, you have Hollywood in the United States. I mean, yes, you do not even need to go at that level. Maybe this is something that should be done to go at that level, I mean, to blow the production capabilities out of the water.

But even college levels, high school kids, to be given projects for them to do, just as part of a school project, as part of a civic engagement process, even Muslim organizations. I mean, maybe you have NGO's who could fund projects within the community to come up with these sorts of things.

The government is really not well placed other than if you were to take it to the covert level of psychological operations and then you do have individuals who know influence activities, who know to generate stuff which they can deploy but in a more covert manner. So, again, multiple layers, there is a way to do it, but——

Senator BOOKER. And, Mr. Bergen, I have very little time left, but when I was mayor of Newark, we saw that the mentions of our city were incredibly negative, and we set out on social media to change that. We used a simple sentiment analysis to see that engagement in social media began to change the brand of our city. You talk a little bit in your testimony about crowding out the negative messages, and I have seen people do this in many different forms. There are lots of different strategies. How do you characterize what we are doing to crowd out the negative messages, to arm many of the people within the American Muslim community and others to compete within this space to begin to push other messages? How would you describe our attempts? And is there a better way to centralize and coordinate across numerous agencies a better push from the United States?

Mr. BERGEN. "Nascent" is how I would characterize what we are doing. NCTC has been doing some of this work and trying to work with some of the tech companies and the Muslim American Community. But, there is a kiss of death problem with the U.S. Government being involved. So it has to be hands-off. And it is beginning. It is not all doom and gloom. There are people out there doing the kind of work that is necessary.

Senator BOOKER. OK. Chairman, thank you very much.

Chairman JOHNSON. Thank you, Senator Booker.

There is an obvious piece of legislation that we need to start working on. I have already directed the staff. But let us face it. We invented the Internet. We invented these social network sites. We have Hollywood. We have the capabilities, as Mr. Shaikh was saying, to blow these guys out of the water from the standpoint of communications. So we need to work on that, and we need to work

on that quickly. So I hope you will engage in that effort. Senator Ayotte.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR AYOTTE

Senator AYOTTE. I want to thank the Chairman, and I appreciate Senator Booker's comments as well. It strikes me, though, in hearing your answers, it makes sense that this is not going to just be a government function, because government is not particularly good at some of these updated uses of technology. So I think engaging the private sector, engaging NGO's and others to help us do that, and we can provide the support for that, but I think that would be great to establish those partnerships to be able to make that happen.

I was very interested in reading, in your testimony especially, Mr. Bergen, about women, that there seems to be an attraction for young women that they are recruiting with more than, I think, a historical basis to ISIS. Can you talk to me about that? And it seems to me that as I look at some of these uses on social media, they almost romanticize what is happening over in Iraq and Syria and what these women who might want to either join or, I guess, connect themselves in the United States or in some other Western country with ISIS. So it strikes me that the more we can get the truth out also, whether it is embedding reporters or what are really the conditions—I know it is very dangerous so that is challenging. But however we can get the truth out about what is really happening on the ground in the caliphate, that this is not some kind of romantic endeavor that you are probably traveling to or asking to engage in. So I wanted to get thoughts on how we address this with women.

Mr. BERGEN. Well, that is right, Senator. So 20 percent of the sample we looked at from the United States are women and about 10 percent overall from the West are women, which is unprecedented. And why are they going there? They have been told it is a perfect society. They may want to meet their perfect marriage partner. All of these are very young. The average age is 19. But how do we contest that? I think you are exactly right. People like Mubin Shaikh and, disillusioned former militants who can actually speak the truth about what is happening and amplifying their voices, that is by far the most effective thing we can do. So it is finding those people, and there are already people coming back who—we saw this in the Minnesota case, Senator Johnson, when people started saying, well, wait a minute, Shabaab is not the Promised Land.

But it took 2 or 3 years before the message—and I am sure J.M. Berger can amplify on this. But we are at the point where there are enough bad stories coming out that I think that is a reasonable kind of idea, which is amplifying the voices of disillusioned militants.

Mr. BERGER. Yes, I think when we are looking at trying to undermine ISIS' messaging, one problem we have is that the information we have that does undermine their projection of strength, of this utopian society, is mostly eyewitness testimony from defectors. That is not as compelling as photographs, video, and audio. And so, one of the things that I proposed is that inasmuch as we can deploy

intelligence assets to get pictures of what is going on in these area, intercepted communications, things that are much more gripping and much more compelling, instead of just one person's story, which is easy for a radical to dismiss because radicals are already convinced that they have the right idea anyway.

Mr. BERGEN. If I could jump in, on the flip side of this, there is a wonderful site called "Silently Slaughtering Raqqa," which is a Twitter feed of what is really going on in Iraq. There are pictures of bread lines. They are saying, hey, the electricity is only on for 3 hours a day. So the point is that there is an alternative universe on social media that is portraying what is really happening that exists and we should understand and know about.

Senator AYOTTE. Absolutely, and we should promote it and encourage people to see what really is happening, because I think there is sort of a romanticized view being pushed out there that is attractive to people.

I wanted to get your thoughts, all of you, on the leader of ISIS, Al-Baghdadi. They are using social media, using information to put out a certain image of him that does not line up with the truth. What is your thought on the leader? I understand we take out a leader and another leader can follow, but he seems to have portrayed himself in a certain way. What thoughts do you have for us to try to undermine the leadership to show that they are not really who they purport to be?

Mr. BERGER. So I think Baghdadi is kind of an interesting figure in this context. In some ways, he is kind of an empty suit or a Rorschach test. He has a basic biography which is carefully calculated to support the legitimacy of naming him caliph. We know a little bit more about him through independent reporting, but the image that he projects is really somebody who appears rarely, who speaks in jihadist platitudes, and as such, he is somewhat replaceable. You can bring your expectations to who he is and understand him in the context that you want. He does not have the same powerful personality that somebody like Osama bin Laden did. He is replaceable. I would assume that ISIS has a plan for his succession because they do have to meet certain criteria to replace a caliph. It is not like al-Qaeda where you can just give the guy who has the most seniority the job. And he may be an important strategic thinker in the group. I mean, there are some reasons to think that. So replacing him may undercut their ability to operate, but it may not.

Senator AYOTTE. I think we touched on this earlier, but how important in all this context is it that we—thinking about what ISIS is doing actually on the ground and trying to establish this caliphate in Iraq and Syria—I serve on the Armed Services Committee as well—that we continue to work with our partners there to actually diminish their capacity. Because I think I heard one of you say that the fact that they control territory gives them a greater ability to recruit because it shows their legitimacy. So it is almost like we have to be addressing this on all fronts, it seems.

Mr. BERGEN. I think the short answer is yes to that.

Mr. BERGER. One element of this that I would just bring up, because we have talked a lot about how their loss of territory would undermine their recruiting, and it would. But ISIS is also an apoc-

alyptic millenarian group, and traditionally what happens with groups like this is when the prophecies that they are fulfilling turn out not to be correct, they will often double down on violence. So ISIS could lose its territory. We could undercut its recruiting. But we could see very disastrous secondary effects to that.

Senator AYOTTE. We have seen that with al-Qaeda as well.

Mr. BERGER. We see it with Al-Shabaab, and Al-Shabaab does not have the same platform or prophecy that ISIS has built itself on, so yes.

Senator AYOTTE. Great. Thank you.

Chairman JOHNSON. Thank you, Senator Ayotte. Senator Portman.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR PORTMAN

Senator PORTMAN. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for having the hearing. This has been fascinating, and I really appreciate the experts coming and talking to us about this.

Let me just give you an interesting case study from Ohio, the middle of the country. Like every other State here, we are concerned about radicalization, and there were recently two cases. One is Christopher Lee Cornell, as some of you know, a 20-year-old in Cincinnati, Ohio, my home town, wanted to come here and bomb the Capitol. That happened earlier this year. He is now under arrest.

Just last month, Abdirahman Sheik Mohamud of Columbus was indicted on Federal charges. He actually became the first American, as I understand it, accused of training in Syria and then returning to try to conduct a terrorist attack here in the United States.

So one is a classic lone wolf, right? So he is on the Internet, gets radicalized, a loner. The second is a member of a community in central Ohio, as I understand it, the Somali community. I know a number of members of that community. They are very concerned about the radicalization. They are engaged and involved in it. The leaders are working hard to have a productive dialogue about it. Some of the things you all talked about they are doing. And it is two very different challenges, and we have talked more about the community one, and I would like to hear more about that if you have thoughts, but also about the lone wolf. And maybe this goes to more of what Senator Booker was talking about. I looked at your appendices, Mr. Shaikh, and unbelievable, the kinds of stuff that they are doing. And we certainly have the capability to do more with more resources.

So I guess my first question would be: Do you view these as two distinct challenges, two very different strategies, and just assessing the two strategies? And a subpart of that would be a specific question I have always had. You have three groups—DHS, NCTC, and FBI—all working together to try to support these community outreach programs, understanding that, as Mr. Shaikh said, local police are the face of it, but to get these best practices and the expertise, frankly, our local communities are not going to have the access to that. Are they doing a good job coordinating? Or should there be one agency that has more responsibility and, therefore, ac-

countability? And I will really open it up. I would like to hear from all of you.

Mr. BERGEN. Training overseas makes you more dangerous. We saw in Paris that the fact that one of the perpetrators had trained with al-Qaeda in Yemen made it a much more effective attack. So, yes, they are very different, and lone wolves have a natural ceiling to what they can do because they are operating alone and they do not have an organization and they usually do not have training. So they are two separate issues.

I am glad you mentioned, Senator Portman, Mr. Mohamud from Cincinnati, Ohio, because he is the only returnee who has come back to the United States who is alleged to have plotted an attack.

Senator PORTMAN. Columbus.

Mr. BERGEN. Columbus. Pardon me, sir. Crucially, he was trained by Nusra, which we have not really talked about today, which is the al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria. So, the focus is a lot on ISIS, but the two cases of Americans coming back to the United States, one of whom did not plot anything here, one who is alleged to, were both Nusra. So we need to keep that in mind.

Senator PORTMAN. This is particularly troubling and interesting because it was not Al-Shabaab, even though, as I understand it, he came from the Somali community, and you would have thought it would have been Al-Shabaab.

Mr. BERGER. I think in that particular case it was not clear in the court documents exactly who he had trained with. He had started with Nusra, and then he went to an unspecified training camp and talked to unspecified clerics while he was posting about the Islamic State.

In terms of the problems, these are two different problems. We could see ISIS try and bridge the two to coordinate loosely lone wolf-type activity with organized-type terrorist activity. In the case of this returnee, this may be a dry run to see what happens when you send somebody back.

We have seen that ISIS has had returned fighters who have been active in Europe. We have seen at least one case of what was described by investigators as an ISIS operational cell in Belgium. There is not much reason to think that they will not try this kind of thing. So, we need to sort of keep an eye on this as it develops.

The lone wolf piece of it is easy for them. It is easy, it is something they have proven that they are pretty good at relative to other groups. And it is going to capture a lot of headlines for them without a big investment. So the question is how much they want to invest in attacks here, and I think that is pretty unclear right now. We do not have a clear bead on that.

Senator PORTMAN. Mr. Shaikh, could you talk a little about the coordination between DHS and the FBI and the NCTC?

Mr. SHAIKH. Yes, there is a DHS coordinator on countering violent extremism (CVE): David Gersten. He comes from a civil liberties background, which I was pleasantly surprised to see that DHS is putting that kind of resource in that area. The Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties is also looking at how to avoid the securitization aspect of it. The securitization aspect of it is really poisonous to the CVE branding, I think, as communities, if they perceive especially at the behest of what I call these obstructionist

community groups who are really giving a false narrative of what the government is trying to do, it will continue to be a problem.

If I could just quickly make a point on the lone wolf, what kind of lone wolves are we talking about? I call them "ISIS zombies." These are the self-activating, might have mental health issues, really low level of competency. But then you could have, directed attackers who, let us say, are Syria returnees and do have a level of competency where just one person can pull off a quite effective attack.

In Paris, of course, only two guys did what they did, so you could easily have a cell of, six people, three two-man teams, to go and do simultaneous attacks, and it would really cause some great disruption. So there are, again, a number of threats in that spectrum.

Senator PORTMAN. Just back to the community for a second, you were making the point that we need to do a better job of providing best practices community by community. It would be a local face you said was important, getting the community engaged and involved, and, again, I said the Somali community in central Ohio has been very involved, and I think in a productive dialogue. Is the Federal Government where, we have responsibility, doing an effective job of coordinating between the three agencies I mentioned, and perhaps even some other agencies that are more on the intelligence side? Is that working? Or should there be more accountability that comes from more definitive responsibility?

Mr. SHAIKH. It is working. I am positive, optimistic on that side. First and foremost is because there was no coordinator before, and so now that there is a coordinator and that is happening, it is a positive step. It is running into these issues of critics saying, this is just an excuse to intelligence-gather, but I think DHS and their particular mechanisms that are working on CVE are trying to navigate this space as best as possible.

Chairman JOHNSON. Thank you, Senator Portman. We will start another round.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman JOHNSON. I started my opening statement with a description of that posting with the claim that there are 71 trained fighters, 23 have accepted assignments. Again, nobody knows whether that is bluster or whether it is real. I will ask the question: Is that an unprecedented posting? Have we seen similar things like that, similar threats that just simply have not panned out? Anybody?

Mr. BERGEN. I think we have multiple times, and I will give you an example. Do you remember the blackout on the east coast? I think it was in 2005. Some jihadi group claimed credit. So, I mean, merely because they say something does not mean it is true.

Chairman JOHNSON. What about from ISIS, though, I mean recently? Or is that kind of unprecedented from ISIS?

Mr. BERGER. No, it is pretty precedented. The volume of material they put out is just truly extensive, and it comes in a lot of different formats. So they have made a variety of threats with more or less specificity over time. One of the reasons that it was surprising about the Garland event was that it was something that they had actually specifically talked about, but then it turned into an attack, and that is pretty unusual because they create so much

noise that that needle in the haystack can be very difficult to detect.

Chairman JOHNSON. So you really take that posting with a great deal of skepticism?

Mr. BERGER. Yes, I——

Chairman JOHNSON. The attempt at a winning message.

Mr. BERGER. Yes. I think that, certainly they have dozens to low hundreds of passive supporters in this country, and some of those people may be prepared to act, but I do not think there is anything remotely as organized as what that post described.

Chairman JOHNSON. Mr. Gartenstein-Ross, certainly in your testimony, both written and oral, you were talking about the rise of the brand of ISIS. But they are also very vulnerable to a reversal of that. I certainly hope that is true. I also understand strategically they have made a lot of enemies, and they are being attacked on a number of different fronts.

The stated goal of this administration of America right now is to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIS. I have asked the administration officials in the past, What does defeat look like? Define it. I would like to have you gentlemen take a crack at what does defeat look like to you and how achievable is that. I will start with you, Mr. Gartenstein-Ross.

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. I think there is actually a very clear thing that defeat means in this context, which is not true of other jihadist groups. They have staked their legitimacy to the caliphate's continuing viability, and if the caliphate is no longer viable, then they can lose legitimacy pretty quickly. So I think that if you are able to make the caliphate no longer a viable entity and no longer perceived as a viable entity, then at that point they have in effect lost.

Now, their narrative will not be completely dead. If you understand the nuances of their narrative and the end times argument, they have certain outs. For example, they believe that at some point there will be a grand battle and they actually will be crushed. But what essentially it means is that you make this already marginal movement much more marginal.

Let me actually add one final thing, because this ties to the way we are conceptualizing community and lone wolves. Sometimes we talk about what can the community do to delegitimize the message. The way I would think of it is: What can the community do to continue to delegitimize the message? Because for the United States, if we had a 5-percent approval rating, we would think that was an awful thing. For ISIS, they can have a 5-percent approval rating and that is a great thing for them, because they are dealing with those who are very much on the margins. They are not even dealing with the whole jihadist movement. There are many within the jihadist movement who argue against ISIS.

So the question really is not how do we change an entire community, but how do we stop this fringe group from spurring people to action? And that is why undermining the legitimacy of the caliphate actually will, in my view, have a disproportionate impact on their ability to remain viable as a movement.

Chairman JOHNSON. Does anyone else have a different definition of "defeat"?

Mr. BERGER. I think that we are best served by strategies that encourage ISIS to fail on its own terms. Cutting it off economically—an internal collapse or a major schism inside the group I think would be better for us than a forcible ejection from their territory, especially if that ejection was done primarily through American military——

Chairman JOHNSON. But that is the method, the defeat, I mean, how it looks like is the denial of that territory, the end of the caliphate, correct?

Mr. BERGER. Oh, yes, well, it is the end of their territory, but it is not the end of the story. I mean, they already have branches in—a robust presence in Nigeria, in Libya.

Chairman JOHNSON. An important point. I am glad you pointed that out. Again, does anybody else have a different definition of "defeat"?

[No response.]

So then my next question is—I am no military expert, and I do not think we have one on the panel. You have expertise that has been very valuable here. How far away are we from that definition of "defeat"?

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. As you said, I do not think anyone on this panel can say, but I can point to a few things we should look to.

No. 1, looking to internal resistance movements is very important. I agree with J.M. Berger that, at the end of the day, if the defeat comes from within, that is going to be a much more resounding defeat.

Chairman JOHNSON. But how possible is that?

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. We already see resistance movements in some areas. Now, the question is how—there are two things to this. No. 1 is how robust are they. In the past we saw very robust resistance movements to AQI, but the United States also played a role in helping to ensure that they were not destroyed.

The second thing I should warn is I think a lot of these resistance movements are also people we do not like. You have, on the one hand, probably Ba'athist resistance movements, and I would say almost certainly you have al-Qaeda resistance movements, which plays into the broader struggle within jihadism.

But that being said, looking to internal dissent, looking to, No. 2, internal squabbles—there was a question before about Baghdadi, and while I think that Baghdadi is replaceable, once you have a succession, especially within an organization like this, which has a cult of personality internally, that might cause some greater fragmentation within ISIS, which could be a good thing in terms of the defeat of ISIS specifically.

The final thing we could look to is, given that they are a bit overstretched militarily, you could possibly see rapid reversals, just like when the United States engaged in its campaigns early in the Iraq war and the Afghanistan war, and also even in Libya, there were very rapid reversals of the enemy that was trying to hold territory. It is hard to hold territory, particularly when your population is not particularly happy with what you are doing.

Chairman JOHNSON. I do have a remaining second, so I just have to ask this question: Mr. Shaikh, talk about engagement with com-

munities; understanding local police better, how to have a coordinated effort, and how do we find more Mubin Shaikhs? How do we find more people like you that have had a change of heart and that have your capacity and your capability and your willingness to really appeal and try and turn people away from this?

Mr. SHAIKH. I wish we could clone me. [Laughter.]

Chairman JOHNSON. I think we all do as well.

Mr. SHAIKH. I tried to do the right thing. I got here because I believe I did make the right decisions. And it came at a lot of personal cost, I will be honest, and I think a lot of people may not be ready to do that.

I think, when we say empowerment, I think it needs to be made clear for a lot of these individuals who are back and really the intelligence community knows who these people are after they have been vetted and maybe they need to have continual monitoring, but to have them step up, go to Muslim conferences, let them be seen on media, mainstream media, where people hear the message. I do not want to be the only person. A lot of times I feel frustrated. I see, I am the only guy doing it. Everyone is talking about countermessaging. Nobody is really doing enough of it. But there are others like me out there. They just do not know how to come forward, and so they will need some direction to do that.

Chairman JOHNSON. I think I speak for all of us when I say God bless you for what you are doing. Senator Carper.

Senator CARPER. I am Tom Carper, and I approve that message. God bless you.

This is one for all of you, please, and I just want to say, Mr. Shaikh, do you pronounce your name "Mu-BEAN" or "MOO-bin."

Mr. SHAIKH. It is "Mu-BEAN."

Senator CARPER. Mubin, all right. Have you ever been called "MOO-bin"?

Mr. SHAIKH. Yes, I have. In high school it was "MOO-bin," and then it became "Bin," and then the joke was, "1A'Bin,'" like bin Laden?" Then it stopped being funny. [Laughter.]

Senator CARPER. We have a "Bin," not like bin Laden, in our family.

Several of my colleagues have said that in order for the United States. to have a success against al-Qaeda and against ISIS, we must adequately define the problem and our enemy, and they suggest that we should unequivocally announce that the United States is at war with Islamic extremism or radical Islam. In your opinions, is it necessary or beneficial for the United States to define ISIS and al-Qaeda in this manner? I will ask you, Daveed, to go first, please.

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. The question really is: What is the benefit of doing so? I am not sure that there is a benefit in explicitly emphasizing that we are at war with radical Islam. There is the question embedded in that: What is radical Islam?

In Libya, for example, one of the problems with one of the warring factions in that civil war, that being the Dignity faction, is that Khalifa Haftar, who is very high—he is their commander in chief—defines radical Islam, defines the enemy as including both Islamists who work in the political process and also jihadist organizations, which makes it, if one were to, say, support his organiza-

tion, would make it a civil war that is much bloodier and much more broadly defined than it should be.

Second, the administration has moved away from using religious rhetoric. It has tried to avoid terms like "Islam" and "jihad" in its own rhetoric. And I think that is a reasonable thing to do in terms of public messaging. The area where I sometimes disagree is that I think that if we as analysts are not able to process the ideological dimension, we are at a disadvantage. But in terms of public messaging, I do not think it is advantageous for the United States to make its enemy radical Islam, writ large.

Senator CARPER. Thanks. Mubin.

Mr. SHAIKH. Thank you, sir. Terrorists in Islamic Costume. It uses the adjective Islamic in a correct way, because I believe Islamic terrorism is an oxymoron. But because they are appealing to the Islamic sources and not the Bhagavad Gita, I mean, we need to see something Islam. So Terrorists in Islamic Costume, and if I could impose the Muslim term for these people, it is "Khawarij," as I have in the—K–H–A–W–A–R–I–J. And I have given scriptural references from the Prophet—Peace Be Upon Him—who referred to Khawarij in the most vile terms. They are the dogs of hell. In fact, we believe in the Islamic tradition that these people subscribe to that the anti-Christ himself emerges from the last remnants of the Khawarij. So those are the two terms that I encourage using.

Senator CARPER. All right. Thanks. J.M.?

Mr. BERGER. So I do agree with Daveed that we need to understand the religious dimension of this as people studying the problem. However, in terms of public dialogue and in terms of the motivation of this, we must name the enemy kind of motif, the thing that I think about when I think about this is that, in 2013, I did a study of white supremacists' use of Twitter and found that the people who were following white supremacists on Twitter talked continually about and primarily about mainstream conservative Republican politics. And we do not insist that neo-Nazis be referred to as "conservative radicals" or "Republican radicals," and I think that there is a double standard. It is easier to insist when it is a minority.

Senator CARPER. All right. Thanks for that. Mr. Bergen.

Mr. BERGEN. I totally endorse what has already been said. As a public messaging matter for the U.S. Government, it should be very careful about using these terms. As an analytical question, certainly this has something to do with Islam, difficult as that is to maybe say. But those are two different aspects of the problem.

Senator CARPER. All right. Thank you all for those responses.

As you know, in religion in this country—I will not speak about other countries, but in the Protestant faith we have many flavors, Protestants. We have Methodists, Lutherans, Baptists, Presbyterians, and the list goes on and on and on. And when we think of the Muslim faith, as I understand it, it is not just one or two but many. But we oftentimes think of Shia and we think of Sunni, but I realize it is not that simple.

But when you look at those—what is it, ISIS, al-Qaeda, if you look at the folks that are the jihadists and they are bent on—what is it, caliphate or just domination, destruction? I do not notice as

much Shia involvement. Is that my imagination or not? Could you speak to that for me, one of you or both of you?

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. Certainly with respect to ISIS and al-Qaeda, you do not have Shia involvement. Both of them are Sunni movements. ISIS in particular is vehemently anti-Shia. al-Qaeda is quite anti-Shia, although has tried to constrain that a bit.

When you think of Shia movements, Hezbollah is the primary one that is a non-state actor with state sponsorship. You also have Shia movements who are kind of part of our coalition in Iraq, these non-state Shia militias, but they pose their own set of problems. A lot of them are quite radical. If you look at what they are actually doing, they are brutalizing the Sunni population there, and that could make this a longer-term problem.

So, yes, in terms of ISIS, al-Qaeda, absolutely. But I certainly would not factor out the importance of some of these Shia militant non-state groups. And one person who has done very good work on this is Phillip Smyth at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, releasing a major monograph on this earlier this year, which I think is really essential reading for understanding that particular aspect of this conflict.

Senator CARPER. All right. Thanks.

Last question, if I could. Mr. Berger, could you share with us the story of Omar Shafik Hammami, please, and your experiences with him, please?

Mr. BERGER. So Omar Hammami was an Alabama native. He was born in a family to a Syrian father and an Irish Catholic mother, and he became radicalized and joined Al-Shabaab. And where I came into the story was after he joined Al-Shabaab, he got there and discovered that things were not to his liking. So foreign fighters were not being treated well. Al-Shabaab had a nasty habit of assassinating al-Qaeda emissaries who had been sent to try and rein the group in. There was corruption and inconsistencies ideologically, and so he took to the Internet and put out a video saying, "Look, I have all these problems with Al-Shabaab, and I expressed my opinions, and now they are trying to kill me, and I need help." And this plea was directed to al-Qaeda central. He imagined that somebody from al-Qaeda would come riding in to save him, which did not happen.

In many ways, he was kind of a vanguard of the emergence of this movement on social media, and not the only one by any stretch, but prior to about 2012, 2013, jihadists' use of social media was much lower. And because of Omar but also because of other dissenters from the lockstep jihadi movement, people started getting online. They started coming online to argue with Omar. So Al-Shabaab dispatched people to come out and say, "This guy is a liar." And then people popped up to push back on that, and it sort of escalated out from there. And the same thing was happening in the al-Qaeda in Iraq context on the jihadist forums.

I had an extended correspondence with Hammami on social media, which was an unusual experience. Some of my comments about the remote intimacy and sort of the feeling of knowing somebody over social media are informed by that because, when you talk to somebody briefly every day or every couple of days, you can get a sense of them as a person, which may be artificial and in-

flated in your head. But they become much more real to you than somebody you are reading about or somebody you correspond with via post.

Senator CARPER. Very interesting. A very interesting hearing, and I think very informative. Thank you. Thank you all.

Chairman JOHNSON. Thank you, Senator Carper. Senator Booker.

Senator BOOKER. Again, I want to thank the panel so much for being here today, and your written testimony was so strong and enabled my staff to begin thinking about these issues and its many layers, and I am grateful for that.

In the final minutes of this hearing, I would just like to ask you all, if you were a Senator—and I know that is a scary prospect. If you all were Senators or even in a high-level executive position and were looking at this issue of countercommunications, in light of our "nascent" and "rudimentary" before, communications what would be the ideal effort? If you could push for 2 years—and the Chairperson said this should make us think about legislation—what specifically in terms of strategy and tactics would you want to see being implemented on a broader scale by 2016, 2017? Anybody can pick that up, and maybe we can go down the line. Daveed.

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. I think we often look at this problem in a way that is very inefficient and is not getting to the solution, and you in your previous question, Senator, spoke to this. I referenced the U.S. Government as a legacy industry, and I do not say that lightly. A lot of established companies have actually seen it as beneficial to essentially create a startup within the company, and that has been a very successful thing for a number of companies to do. I would point to Intuit, the tax company, as one that did a very good job of creating a very interesting tax app where people through their cell phone could get all tax documents. They did this, very much like a startup would do, by creating a unit which was a startup within a broader company.

With respect to this specific issue, social media, I would want to see a startup within the U.S. Government, something where you can get the best people on board, and there are a few layers of that. One is: Are we able to work with the right people? Yesterday, I spent the morning with a Lebanese businessman, an owner of a media company who had these remarkable anti-extremism ads on his computer that his company had put together. He knows the region well, and he was looking to shop them around. But the production value was extraordinarily high. Are we getting the right production value? Do we have the right people in place? Often multiple things make it hard to have the right people in place.

So one of the things I would look at is not just starting a startup but looking at the broader rules that prevent us as a government from having the best people in place to tackle these very thorny problems.

Senator BOOKER. I want to interrupt just because I want to get through the whole panel, but anything that you would like to provide in the days after this hearing of that idea you just mentioned, I would love to pounce on, because I think you are speaking not only a truth but you are speaking an urgent truth. But just to move to Mubin. Mr. Shaikh.

Mr. SHAIKH. Very quickly, subject matter experts to guide and train government agencies, whether it is law enforcement, whether it is military, psychological operations, whatever it is, and ultimately autonomy of efforts on the ground to move at the speed of social media. If I can quote Bruce Lee, you know, "Be like water," formlessness, autonomy.

Senator BOOKER. And I think that is a really important point, because somebody else mentioned that, that often you delegitimize the organic voices when you put a U.S. Government stamp on that. And I think it is really important to have strategies that create an atmosphere in which those organic voices can emerge without being delegitimized by the U.S. Government. Mr. Berger.

Mr. BERGER. So, yes, we are getting creamed on social media, not just by ISIS but also by Russia, Iran, and Syria. This is a difficult thing. We do not do propaganda well because we have principles that we adhere to that these adversaries do not, in terms of truthfulness, in terms of fairness.

What we can match them on is volume. We talk about CSEC as an effort to counterprogram against these guys. They are working with a handful of Twitter accounts. What would have an impact and would get around some of the logjams of government in terms of content would be to have hundreds or thousands of accounts that are putting out even very innocuous messaging just to get us into the space and holding a presence, and we can refine the messaging as we go. I think there is risk aversion in government that prevents us from doing things that are experimental and daring in that space. But I think if we are out there in the space first, then we can figure out where to take the ship after that.

Mr. BERGEN. Two ideas about what to do, which are not to do with messaging, but have not been discussed so far. One is there is sort of a good-news story going on with Turkey. If you look at ISIS' English language propaganda, they are now saying, Turkish intelligence is not your friend. So this Committee overseas the Customs and Border Protection (CBP). We should be giving every technical assistance possible to Turkey and reinforcing and congratulating them for basically changing what had been a very lackadaisical approach to being a more proactive approach.

The other thing we should be doing as a government is to be building a database of every foreign fighter from the West, because we know from previous jihads that one in nine foreign fighters returning to the West will engage in an act of terrorism. If that continues to be the case in this jihad, we need to know that a group of visa waiver countries, who exactly these people are, to the best of our ability.

Senator BOOKER. Gentlemen, thank you very much for a really great panel and for your work on these issues. I am grateful. I have learned a lot. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman JOHNSON. Thank you, Senator Booker.

Again, I am very serious. We need to work on this, and I certainly want to engage the members of the panel and other experts you can put us in touch with in terms of how do we do this. How do we set up a Center of Excellence? Is it inside government? Outside of government? Do you fund it? We need to work on this.

Senator BOOKER. I suspect it is both.

Chairman JOHNSON. I agree. But, again, it is urgent, as we have said.

One thing I do like to do is provide the witnesses a final bite at the apple here if there is something that you want to get off your chest, a final statement. I would start with Mr. Bergen.

Mr. BERGEN. Looking forward, we have a chance to not have a hearing like this 5 years from now about Afghanistan if we change, the idea that we are going to turn off the lights of our presence there on December 31, 2016, merely because the Obama Administration is going to be shortly out of office is crazy. The Afghans want us to stay, and we were attacked from there, obviously, on 9/11. It is in our interest to stay, and I think it is in the interest of both parties to say that we plan to stay. We have an agreement with the Afghans until 2024, a strategic partnership agreement. The work has already been laid out. So I would, looking forward, this is a proactive measure to prevent having the same kind of hearing about Afghanistan several years from now.

Chairman JOHNSON. I hope we have learned that failed States are not good for our security.

Mr. BERGEN. Indeed.

Chairman JOHNSON. Mr. Berger.

Mr. BERGER. I think that ISIS is kind of the harbinger of radical social change ahead of us and that we need to sort of be prepared to see what happens when people can communicate in these daily routine ways with people of similar interests around the world and you can travel to join somebody in a relatively easy way. I think we are going to see social networks and societies that are going to be sorting themselves out into groups that are clustered around specific interests, and, unfortunately, we are seeing, what I would hope would be the worst example of that is the first, but I think there is potential for a lot of interesting evolution of how we deal with each other as human beings that is ahead.

Chairman JOHNSON. I fear that is the future reality. Mr. Shaikh.

Mr. SHAIKH. Thank you, sir. Very quickly on, I guess, the Muslim side of things, just given the things that have happened, we really need to pay attention to the marginalization narrative. I think Muslims are your best partners in this. I think Muslims understand that we cannot do it without each other. It is a common enemy. They are not going to think twice, if I am there with my family, I will be killed just along with everyone else. So we are in this together. Let us move together.

Chairman JOHNSON. Again, help us make those connections. Mr. Gartenstein-Ross.

Mr. GARTENSTEIN-ROSS. I agree with what J.M. Berger said, that we are in for an era of radical social change due to the unprecedented ability for a variety of movements to organize. And the question for us is: Are we up for this new era? I think we have grown content with a system in which a lot of things do not work, where we try to address problems and it gets lost somewhere in the bureaucracy, and there is an interagency process, and everyone is waiting for someone else to do something, and what we are getting in terms of outputs is so suboptimal that, if the U.S. Government were a corporation, people would lose their jobs.

I think the questions are: Can we move fast enough? Are there too many bureaucratic obstacles? If so, what can we do to smash those obstacles? And are we transparent enough both internally, in terms of getting by within the government, and also externally, getting by publicly and in the broader world community?

We have talked a number of times about how the United States has a bad brand. That is absolutely true. There is no question about that. But I also think that, looking at the big picture, we should not be content with this. The United States is a great country. We should not be content with the United States just having a bad brand and there is nothing we can do about it. I think that is also one of those very big issues that we should try to change, and we should make sure we can have the right people in place who can bring the right ideas. And right now, even having the right people in place is something that is hard for the government to do. That should change.

Chairman JOHNSON. Well, again, having come from a manufacturing background and solved a lot of problems, there is a process. It starts with laying out the reality, understanding exactly what it is, then set yourself achievable goals. I think today's hearing has certainly laid out a reality here that I wish were not true. I wish we did not have to face it, but we cannot keep our head buried in the sand.

So, again, I just want to thank the witnesses for your thoughtful testimony and your thoughtful answers to questions. Mr. Shaikh, again, thank you for doing what you are doing. Thank you all for doing what you are doing.

This hearing record will remain open for 15 days until May 22 at 5 p.m. for the submission of statements and questions for the record.

This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:34 a.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
"Jihad 2.0: Social Media in the Next Evolution of Terrorist Recruitment"
May 7, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

Good morning and welcome.

The horrific displays of violence committed by the terrorist group ISIS, and their exhortations for their followers to do the same in the U.S., have rightly placed a spotlight back on the threat of terrorism to the homeland. The most recent of these cowardly acts occurred when two Arizona men opened fire in Garland, Texas, just hours after posting pro-ISIS messages on social media. The almost weekly arrests of American citizens attempting to travel to conflict zones in Syria and Iraq in order to fight on behalf of organizations such as ISIS also is of great concern. Combined, these phenomena represent the evolving nature of terrorism.

Since that fateful day in September 2001, the United States has been combating groups and individuals who seek to attack, and if it were in their power, kill our people and destroy our way of life. While the threat has remained persistent, the methods used by terrorist organizations to recruit followers and carry out these attacks have changed. In order to understand the nature of the current threat to America, it is important to understand these changing recruitment methods and the challenges they pose.

Social media constitute a tool used by ISIS to radicalize followers and inspire them to commit acts of terror on their behalf in the United States and abroad. Earlier this month a Madison, Wis., man was arrested after attempting to join ISIS. He expressed support for the group and communicated with other alleged ISIS supporters through social media, and he is not alone. One of our witnesses today will tell us about the approximately 46,000 overt ISIS supporter accounts on Twitter.

Our law enforcement, intelligence and military efforts have kept the United States mostly safe. The changing nature of the threat, however, requires that we examine the complexities of modern terrorism and determine the risks posed by those who are radicalized in the U.S. and would carry out an attack on American soil. Additionally, we need to deter and prevent those who would travel to a foreign country and fight on behalf of a terrorist organization. Finally, we need to understand what efforts can be most effectively utilized to identify, reduce, and mitigate this threat.

Answering these questions requires that we understand the historical evolution of terrorism and terrorist recruitment, the utilization of social media and other technologies to radicalize and enable followers to act, and what approaches currently are being undertaken to confront these challenges. We have convened today's panel of experts to define the problem for the American people and work toward resolving it.

I thank all the witnesses for testifying today and I look forward to your testimony.

Statement of Ranking Member Thomas R. Carper
"Jihad 2.0: Social Media in the Next Evolution of Terrorist Recruitment"
May 7, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

As this Committee has discussed at a number of hearings over the years, the threats our country faces have evolved significantly since 9/11.

"After 9/11, the most acute terrorist threats came from Osama Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda, which had orchestrated large, complex attacks from remote caves in Afghanistan. Today, Bin Laden is dead. The core of Al-Qaeda as we knew it has been dismantled.

"Unfortunately, Al-Qaeda's affiliates in Yemen, Africa and Syria have filled the void. At the same time, new terror groups like ISIS present an immediate and different kind of threat to the United States both at home and abroad.

"While the threat of major aviation attacks still remains a top concern for American counter terrorism officials, the tactics employed by the groups who are targeting us have broadened and are not as focused on this attack method.

"Groups like ISIS, Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula have used social media and online propaganda to spread their call to extremists here in America and around the world to carry out their own attacks against.

"Moreover, ISIS has seemingly perfected the ability to use social media to lure Western recruits to Syria for training. These new tactics mean that we can no longer rely solely on our ability to use military force to eliminate a terrorist threat. We must – in partnership with our allies overseas – start examining the root causes of why Westerners join the ranks and act in the name of ISIS and Al-Qaeda. We must continue to evolve our own counter terrorism tactics to address these root causes.

"Today, we will begin to examine the narratives put forward by these terrorist groups over social media, and also how those narratives are being used to influence vulnerable individuals here and in other Western countries. And, we will look for common-sense solutions that the government can employ to counter these groups' narratives and to eliminate this tool from terrorists' tool box. I look forward to a productive hearing."

"Jihad 2.0: Social Media in the Next Evolution of Terrorist Recruitment"

Testimony for the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

May 7, 2015

Peter Bergen
Director, International Security Program, New America and Professor of Practice at Arizona State University

This testimony is divided into eight sections.
--the first examines who the Americans involved in Syrian militancy are;
--the second, how these Americans were recruited;
--the third will try and answer the question of why these Americans are being recruited;
--the fourth will assess the true level of threat posed by American fighters returning from Syria;
--the fifth will analyze the threat from those "homegrown" militants who are inspired by Syrian militant groups;
--the sixth will examine the threat to American interests posed by militants from other Western countries fighting in Syria;
--the seventh will examine the climate of fear surrounding the perceived ISIS threat to the States; and
--the final section will discuss what can be done to mitigate the terrorist threats that are considered in this testimony.[1]

1. **Who are the Americans recruited by militant groups in Syria?**

One of the fundamental challenges facing law enforcement about ferreting out which Americans are being drawn to the Syrian conflict is that they fit no profile. Those accused of being involved in Syria-related militancy include Joshua Van Haften, a 34-year-old white man and registered sex offender from Wisconsin, Hoda Muthana, a 20-year-old Alabama woman from a Yemeni-American family who is using social media from Syria to radicalize and recruit others, and Tairod Pugh, a 47-year old African-American convert to Islam who once served in the Air Force.[1] Among the 62 American citizens and residents who have been identified by researchers at New America as being involved in Syria-related militancy there is no ethnic profile – they are Caucasian, Somali-American, Vietnamese-American, Bosnian-American, and Arab-American, among other ethnicities and nationalities. Strangely, and perhaps surprisingly absent from those who have gone to fight for ISIS or al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, the Nusra Front, are Syrian-Americans, except for one individual.[2]

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[1] **Thanks to David Sterman of New America for his help in preparing this testimony, and Emily Schneider and Courtney Schuster of New America for their work on research that also contributed to it.**

[2] The one individual is a South Carolinian teen from a Syrian-American family whose name is not public because he is a juvenile. He was convicted of a gun charge and prosecutors said he intended to join ISIS and conduct an attack inside the United States before leaving. For more see Dys, Andrew. "York teen sent to juvenile prison after plotting to join ISIS, kill American soldiers." Charlotte Observer. 4/21/2015.
http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/article19155336.html#storylink=cpy

This is in sharp contract to an earlier wave of jihadist recruitment from the States that began in 2007 in which a cohort of U.S. militants were drawn to the Somalia civil war and fought alongside the Somali terrorist group, Al-Shabaab. Those militants were overwhelmingly Somali-Americans, most of whom were from Minnesota.

By contrast, Americans drawn to the militant groups fighting in the Syrian conflict hail from all over the United States. According to FBI Director James Comey, the FBI is investigating cases in all 50 states.[2] Indeed among the 62 individuals in the United States that New America has identified in public records or news accounts who tried to join militant groups in Syria such as ISIS or Nusra, or have succeeded in joining such groups, or have helped others to join such groups were residents of 19 states: Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

The majority of those involved are, no surprise, men since jihadist terrorism has in the past overwhelmingly been a male domain, but more than one in five of the 62 Americans involved in Syria-related militant activity are women – an unprecedented development. Women were rarely, present, if at all, among jihadists in previous holy wars in Afghanistan against the Soviets, in Bosnia against the Serbs, and the initial insurgency in Iraq against the U.S.-led occupation more than a decade ago.

Many of the Americans drawn to the Syrian conflict are young. One quarter are teenagers – including five teenage girls, the youngest of whom was 15. On average, New America found that the individuals involved in Syrian militancy are 25.

2. **How are the Americans drawn to militant groups in Syria being recruited?**

We have seen several models of terrorist recruitment inside the United States. The stereotypical view of how al-Qaeda recruitment occurs is that an al-Qaeda operative arrives from overseas to the United States and physically recruits a group of American militants. This form of recruitment is, in fact, quite rare. The Lackawanna Six were one such case. They were a group of six Yemeni-Americans living in the small, decaying Rust Belt town of Lackawanna, New York where they had grown up as American as a Big Mac. But in 2000 they fell under the spell of Kamal Derwish, a charismatic, deeply religious, fellow Yemeni-American, who told them stirring tales of derring-do about his role in the early-1990s war between the Bosnian Muslims and Serbs. Over late night bull sessions fueled by pizza, Derwish, who was a member of al-Qaeda, along with Juma Dosari, another al Qaeda recruiter, led the group of very ordinary men – telemarketers, delivery men, and car salesman – in discussions about the plight of Muslims around the world; gradually they came to embrace a militant form of Islam.[3] Derwish eventually

persuaded the six men that they should go to Afghanistan to see the Taliban in action and deepen their commitment to jihad by attending training camps there.

Derwish and his buddies traveled to Afghanistan in two groups during the spring and summer of 2001. At one of al-Qaeda's Afghan training camps the men trained on M16 rifles, RPGs, and AK-47s. Eventually almost all of the Yemeni-Americans returned home to Lackawanna. It was their bad luck that in the spring of 2002, a handwritten, anonymous letter arrived at the FBI office in Buffalo, which led to their investigation and imprisonment.

A second model is a militant group that forms around a charismatic leader such as a radical cleric or a returning fighter from an overseas jihad. An example of this was a group of young Somali-American men recruited in Minnesota to fight for Al-Shabaab in Somalia who coalesced around Caabdullahi Faarax. Faarax had returned from fighting in Somalia in 2007 to Minneapolis in order to recruit fighters.[4]

The militants drawn to Syria are not radicalizing in prisons. Indeed there is only one clear example of prison radicalization inside the United States since 9/11: a small group of prisoners led by Kevin Lamar James, an African-American convert to Islam, formed a cell dedicated to holy war while they were jailed in California's Folsom prison. James' crew planned to attack a U.S. military recruiting station in Los Angeles on the fourth anniversary of 9/11 as well as a synagogue a month later during Yom Kippur. Members of the group financed their activities by sticking up gas stations, and their plans only came to light during the course of a routine investigation of a gas station robbery by police in Torrance, California who found documents that laid out the group's plans for jihadist mayhem.[5] New America examined the cases of 288 jihadist militants in the United States accused of jihadist terrorism since 9/11 and found that despite a great deal of hyperventilation about the putative dangers posed by "prison radicalization" in American jails, only three of those militants, Kevin James, Levar Washington, and Gregory Patterson, can be said to have clearly radicalized in a U.S. prison.[3]

The only profile that ties together American militants drawn to the Syrian conflict is that they are active in online jihadist circles. More than eight out of ten of the 62 individuals New America identified as involved in Syria-related militancy – with either ISIS or the al-Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front – were active in online jihadist circles. This is something of a boon for law

[3] For another six individuals accused of terrorism related activity there has been limited reporting that they may have radicalized in prison or that they reportedly spent time in jail or prison and the reporting regarding their radicalization is at too early a stage to make a determination. However, in other cases reports have often misidentified individuals as having radicalized in prison when they in fact did not. The six individuals are Farah Mohamed Beledi, Donald Ray Morgan, Michael Finton, Ruben Shumpert, Alton Nolen, and Joshua Van Haften.

enforcement as many of these militants are prolific posters on publicly available social media, which it is perfectly legal for the FBI and police departments to monitor.

Militants in the United States today radicalize after reading and interacting with propaganda online and have little or no physical interaction with other extremists. This trend has been going on for the past several years. Major Nidal Hasan, for instance, who killed 13 at Fort Hood, Texas in 2009, appears to have radicalized largely through reading militant propaganda online. As an active officer in the U.S. military, there was, of course, little opportunity for him to physically meet with fellow militants.

Social media has dramatically accelerated this trend. Of the 62 individual cases that New America examined there were no clear cases of physical recruitment by a militant operative, radical cleric or returning foreign fighter or radicalization while in prison. All of the recruitment happened online, taking the form either of self-recruitment or in some cases direct contact over the Internet with members of ISIS or Nusra. This is not to say that there are no similarities with older models of recruitment. For example, Abdirahman Sheik Mohamud of Ohio remained in contact with his brother who fought with Nusra before he allegedly left for Syria himself to fight with Nusra.[6] Similarly the complaint filed this year against six Minnesota men charged with trying to join ISIS reveals that they were in contact with Abdi Nur, another member of their group, after he had successfully reached Syria.[7] However, even in these cases, which are exceptions to the rule, the radicalization process resembles radicalization via social media far more than radicalization in person.

In a more representative case in the late summer of 2014 19-year-old Mohammed Hamzah Khan of suburban Chicago purchased three airline tickets for flights from Chicago to Istanbul for himself and his 17-year old sister and 16-year-old brother (who have not be named publicly because they were minors). Khan met someone online who had provided him with the number of a contact to call once he had landed in Istanbul who would help to get him and his siblings to the Turkish-Syrian border, and from there on to a region occupied by ISIS. His sister planned to marry an ISIS fighter, while Khan planned to serve in the group's police force. Before leaving, Khan wrote a three-page letter to his parents explaining why he was leaving Chicago to join ISIS. He told them that ISIS had established the perfect Islamic state and that he felt obligated to "migrate" there. The three teenagers planned to meet up with the shadowy ISIS recruiter they had met online, known as Abu Qa'qa, and travel with him, most likely to ISIS headquarters in Raqqa, Syria. They didn't make it. FBI agents arrested Khan and his two siblings at O'Hare airport in early October 2014.

There is no evidence that Khan planned to any act of terrorism in the United States or elsewhere and he failed in his goal of reaching ISIS, but he faces up to fifteen years in prison for allegedly

attempting to provide "material support" in the shape of his own *potential* "services" to the terrorist group.

3. **What is the attraction for the Americans drawn to militant groups fighting in the Syrian war?**

Why would the Khan teenagers, from a comfortable, middle-class family in Chicago, be drawn to Syria and to ISIS? Some answers to that question can be found in ISIS' English webzine, *Dabiq*. In *Dabiq*'s first issue, which debuted in July 2014, the magazine declared that a "new era has arrived" for Muslims. Dabiq is the name of a town in Syria now controlled by ISIS where the final battle between Islam and Rome (the West) is supposed to be fought, according to a *hadith*, one of the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed.[8]

Photographs in the webzine of ISIS militants in American armored vehicles rolling through Iraq seemed to buttress that claim. Graphic photos of dead soldiers from Iraqi forces litter the pages of each of the issues of *Dabiq*. The magazines are also, unsurprisingly, highly sectarian, repeatedly showing images of Shia shrines and tombs, which ISIS believes to be idolatrous, that they had blown up by ISIS. Iraqi Army soldiers – who are generally Shia – are referred to as "apostates" and graphic photos of their executions by ISIS fighters are a staple of the magazine. With these actions, ISIS members fervently believe that they had established a true "caliphate" in the areas that they control, a supposed replication of the perfect Islamic rule of the Prophet Mohammed and his immediate successors in the seventh century. Indeed, ISIS declared a caliphate after it had seized much of northern Iraq in June 2014, an act of chutzpah that not even Osama bin Laden had ever contemplated.

Other articles in *Dabiq* aimed to reassure readers that ISIS is an actual state that provides social services and constructs infrastructure. The magazine asserted that administrators govern towns after the main ISIS fighting force moves on. One issue of *Dabiq* included photos with captions showing "services for Muslims," including street cleaning, electricity repairs, care homes for the elderly, and cancer treatment centers for children.[9] The first issue of *Dabiq* even had a sort of classified ad for "all Muslim doctors, engineers, scholars, and specialists" to come and join ISIS. ISIS also went to great lengths to highlight how *normal* life was in its Islamist utopia releasing, for instance, a video in March 2015 that showed smiling kids taking fairground rides at the Dijla city fairground, near Mosul.

ISIS propaganda, in its various English language online publications and videos, all broadcasted on social media helped to answer the big question: Why would anyone in the United States want to give up their comfortable lives to join ISIS? The answer for ISIS' recruits was some combination of the need to belong to something that they believed was greater than them. It is an idealistic belief that motivates many young people who go on to join the Marines or the Peace

Corps. In the minds of ISIS' recruits, the group is doing something that is of *cosmic importance* that is sanctioned by Allah: defending Sunni Muslim civilians from the terrible onslaughts of the Assad regime, which has not hesitated to use chemical weapons in its war against its own people. At the same time, ISIS is creating what its recruits believe to be a perfect Islamic state, restoring the Caliphate that ceased to exist after the end of World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire – an act that means that every Sunni Muslim should come to its aid. And ISIS is even presenting itself as the vanguard of Muslim warriors who will usher in the End of Times and the final, inevitable battle between the West and Muslims, which presages the arrival of the *Mahdi*, the savior of Islam and the triumph of Islam over all its enemies including the West.

ISIS also presents itself as literally creating a real state with plentiful social services and a place where pious, young Muslim men and women from around the Islamic world can gather and even find their perfect marriage partner. For its Western recruits, there is also something glamorous and even exciting about leaving behind their humdrum lives in the West to join ISIS.

4. **What is the true level of threat posed by American fighters returning from Syria?**

Four years into the Syrian civil war, little evidence has emerged to support the notion that returning fighters from Syria pose a great threat to the United States. To date, there has been only one deadly attack in the West from a fighter returning from Syria – the May 24, 2014 shooting at a Jewish museum in Brussels, Belgium by Medhi Nemmouche, a 29-year-old Frenchman – that killed four people.[10] In the United States, there has only been one case of a fighter returning and allegedly plotting an attack. Speaking at the Council on Foreign Relations in March, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said that about 40 individuals had returned from Syria, and: "We have since found they went for humanitarian purposes or some other reason that don't relate to plotting."[11] In comparison, New America recorded four deadly acts of political violence – killing eight people – inside the United States by extremists with anti-government or racist political views in 2014 alone.[12]

In order to assess the threat posed to the United States by fighters returning from Iraq or Syria, New America collected information on 62 U.S. citizens or residents who have reportedly gone to fight in Syria and Iraq, attempted to do so, or provided support to others who went. Our review of these 62 cases suggests that the threat is worrisome but far from existential, and U.S. law enforcement has generally done a good job of containing it.

Of the 62 reported cases, we identified only 19 involved individuals who actually reached Syria. 31 attempted to travel to Syria but were unsuccessful in doing so, and 12 provided support to others fighting in Syria.

Far from being a launch pad for attacks at home, Syria turned out to be a graveyard for several of the Americans who traveled to fight there. Of the 19 individuals who reached Syria, eight died there. One American, Moner Abu Salha, died conducting a suicide bombing in northern Syria.[13] Douglas McArthur McCain was killed fighting for ISIS.[14] A third American, Abdirahman Muhumed, reportedly also died fighting with ISIS.[15]

Given the high casualty rate in Syria, stopping Americans from a quite-likely death after they are lured to Syria by often predatory online ISIS recruiters may be a significant justification for focusing resources on this issue, in addition to the more obvious goal of preventing an attack in the United States by a returning fighter.

Eight of the Americans who reached Syria remain at large.

Four American fighters returned to the United States from Syria, three of whom were taken into custody and one of whom returned to Syria where he conducted a suicide operation. Eric Harroun returned to the United States after discussions with American officials.[16] He was arrested and charged with providing material support and conspiring to use rocket propelled grenades that he claimed to have fired in Syria.[17] In a second case, Sinh Vinh Ngo Nguyen, who had returned from Syria where he fought with Nusra, al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, was arrested in an informant-led operation and pled guilty to a terrorism charge in December 2013.[18] Another fighter, Moner Abu Salha, who also fought with Nusra, returned to the United States before leaving again for Syria, where he died conducting a suicide attack. The fourth returnee, Abdirahman Sheik Mohamud, a 23-year old Ohio man, is the only case of a returning fighter accused of plotting a terrorist attack in the United States upon his return.

Much remains unclear about Abidrahman Sheik Mohamud's case complicating efforts to determine how serious the alleged plot was. Court documents in the case allege that Mohamud exchanged communications with his brother Abdifatah Aden, who left in May 2013 for Syria where he later died fighting for Nusra. On April 18, 2014, Mohamud left the United States and fought in Syria before returning to the United States on or about June 8, 2014.[19] The indictment alleges that a cleric in Nusra told Mohamud that he should return to the United States to conduct an act of terrorism.[20] The indictment further alleges that Mohamud discussed a desire to kill three or four American soldiers execution-style at a military base in Texas.[21] He reportedly also went to a firing range to practice shooting though his defense attorney says there is no evidence that he sought to stockpile weapons.[22] Mohamud came to the government's attention more than one year ago before he left for Syria and the FBI tried to intervene to prevent him from traveling overseas.[23] After his return, he was monitored by an informant, leading to his arrest.[24] In addition, the owner of the gun range where he practiced shooting reportedly provided a tip to the police.[25]

Rather than being an easy target for returning fighters, the United States benefits from a series of layered defenses that make returning and plotting a sophisticated attack undetected quite difficult. It takes more than a plane ticket for a returning fighter to conduct a sophisticated attack: they also have to gather arms, conduct surveillance, and carry out the attack undetected.[26] This is difficult as Muslim communities have often reported suspicious activity and law enforcement has instituted an aggressive effort using informants and other investigative tools to prevent such an occurrence. According to New America's data, Muslim communities and family members have provided tips in about 30 percent of the 288 jihadist terrorism related cases since 9/11, and in about 8 percent of cases, other individuals have reported suspicious activity.[27] Almost half of the 288 individuals accused of jihadist terrorism-related crimes since 9/11 have been monitored by an informant.[28] Even in the case of Moner Abusalha, which is certainly not a success story given his return undetected to the United States after training with an al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, when he started to try and recruit Americans to go to Syria, a tip put him on the government's radar.[29]

A side-note that is worth considering regarding the cases of Abusalha and Mohamud, the two returnee cases that are the most worrisome regarding the threat posed inside the United States, is that both were affiliated with Nusra, the Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate, and not with ISIS. While ISIS' recruiting may dominate the headlines – it is not the only militant group in Syria that poses a potential threat to the United States.

In assessing the threat posed by returning American fighters, it is worth putting the current Syrian conflict into historical perspective. The historical comparison most people are aware of is the Afghan war against the Soviets and the ensuring civil war, which helped launch bin Laden's al-Qaeda.

Though an important cautionary tale, much has changed since then that makes it a weak comparison for how "blowback" from foreign jihads might affect Western countries.[30] For example, on 9/11, there were 16 people on the U.S. "no fly" list.[31] Today, there are more than 40,000 people.[32] In 2001, there were 32 Joint Terrorism Task Force "fusion centers," where multiple law enforcement agencies work together to chase down leads and build terrorism cases.[33] Now there are 104 centers.[34] A decade ago, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, National Counterterrorism Center, Transportation Security Administration, Northern Command, and Cyber Command didn't exist. In 2014, all of these new post-9/11 institutions make it much harder for terrorists to operate in the United States. The U.S. intelligence budget also grew dramatically after 9/11, with Congress giving the government substantial resources with which to improve its counterterrorism capabilities. In 2013, the United States allocated $72 billion to intelligence collection and other covert activities.[35] Before 9/11, the budget was around one third of that figure: $26 billion.[36]

Perhaps of most relevance to the issue of returning fighters is that prior to 9/11, the law enforcement community demonstrated little interest in investigating or prosecuting individuals who traveled abroad to fight in an overseas jihad.[37] Today, as demonstrated by this hearing, the government considers such persons to be a concern and attempts to track their activities. Many analysts, myself included, predicted "blowback" and attacks in the West after the insurgency in Iraq first took off in 2003 and thousands of foreign fighters flooded into Iraq, yet that blowback, at least in the West, never materialized.[38]

A post-9/11 American fighter flow to jihadist groups abroad that sparked fears but turned out not to be a real threat to the United States was Al-Shabaab's recruitment of American fighters to wage war in Somalia. According to a review by New America, no American fighter who fought in the conflict in Somalia returned to plot an attack in the United States.[39] Instead, about one third of the individuals known to have traveled to fight in Somalia died there, either as suicide bombers or on the battlefield, while others were taken into custody upon their return.[40]

There are, however, worrisome cases of returning militants to the United States since 9/11 that attempted serious attacks. The United States' experience with Americans fighting or training in Afghanistan and Pakistan provides an illustration of what a more serious returnee threat might look like. Najibullah Zazi, Adis Medunjanin, and Zarein Ahmedzay, who all grew up in New York City, traveled to Pakistan, where they ended up receiving training from al-Qaeda, and were sent back to the United States where they were part of a serious plot to bomb the New York City subway in the fall of 2009.[41] On May 1, 2010, Connecticut-based Faisal Shahzad, who was trained in bomb-making techniques in Pakistan by the Pakistani Taliban, left a car bomb undetected in New York City's Times Square that failed to properly explode.[42]

Given the presence of senior al-Qaeda figures in Syria, and Moner Abu Salha's undetected return to the United States, Americans trained by Nusra could be a threat to the United States. Al-Qaeda operatives from Pakistan closely connected to Nusra and known as the Khorasan group are a particular problem. While there is plenty of evidence that much of the focus of Syrian militant groups is on the war in Syria, the Khorasan group is interested in carrying out attacks in the West. Leaders within the group have ties with members of al-Qaeda's Yemeni affiliate, which attempted to bring down a U.S. airliner over Detroit on Christmas Day 2009, and Western officials are concerned that they could pull off an attack on an American or Western passenger jet.[43]

5. **The 'Foreign Fighter' Threat from other Western countries.**

Many fighters from countries other than the United States have traveled to fight in Syria and could pose a potential threat to the United States. So far we have not seen a case of a foreign fighter from another country traveling to the United States to conduct an attack, however, it is

not beyond the realm of possibility. Since 9/11, two of the most serious al-Qaeda plots against the United States have been infiltration attacks from abroad – the 2001 attempt to bring down a U.S. airliner by British "shoe bomber" Richard Reid and the 2009 Christmas Day bombing attempt of another U.S. airliner by Nigerian "underwear bomber" Umar Farouk Abdulmuttalab.

The large number of foreign fighters traveling to fight in Syria from other countries magnifies the potential threat of an infiltration attack. In February 2015, the United States assessed that there are 20,000 foreign fighters from 90 different countries who have traveled to Syria.[44] Of particular concern is the large number of fighters who traveled to Syria from Western countries – many of which the United States includes among the countries with "visa-waiver" status so they can enter the United States relatively easily. The U.S. government estimates that there are 3,400 fighters from Western countries who have fought in Syria. In December 2014, French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said 1,200 individuals from France are involved or have been involved in the Syrian war, 60 of whom are dead and 185 of whom have returned to France.[45] British officials say 700 British citizens have gone to Syria, about half of whom have returned to the United Kingdom.[46]

Tracking the many foreign fighters from Western countries that have gone to Syria and that have returned to the West poses a greater challenge given their larger numbers than tracking the handful of returning American fighters.

6. **The ISIS-inspired homegrown threat.**

Acts of violence by individuals inspired by but with no direct connection to the terrorist groups in Syria pose a more immediate challenge than attacks by returning fighters from Syria. As FBI Director James Comey noted in September 2014 while referring to the December 2013 arrest of Terry Loewen, who was accused of plotting an attack on Wichita Airport in Kansas: "We have made it so hard for people to get into this country, bad guys, but they can enter as a photon and radicalize somebody in Wichita, Kansas."[47] At the time, Comey also noted that ISIS lacked the capability for a sophisticated attack in the United States.[48]

On May 3, 2015, the United States saw its first actual attack inspired by ISIS along the lines of similar ISIS-inspired attacks in Ottawa, Copenhagen, and Paris.[49] Two men were killed by police after opening fire at a contest to draw cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in Garland, Texas organized by the American Freedom Defense Initiative featuring right-wing Dutch politician Geert Wilders, who had been listed on an al-Qaeda hit list. One of shooters, Elton Simpson, had previously been convicted of making a false statement to the FBI regarding plans to travel to Somalia. Before conducting the attack Simpson tweeted his allegiance to ISIS.[50] Simpson, a 30-year old resident of Phoenix, Arizona who was born in Illinois and converted to Islam during his

youth, was joined in the attack by his roommate Nadir Soofi, a 34-year old who was born in Garland, Texas.[51]

The shooting in Texas is not a lone case. While the United States has seen only one possible case of a domestic attack plot by a returned fighter from Syria, it has seen a number of alleged Syria-related plots to conduct violence that were inspired by the propaganda put out by Syrian militant groups.

- Last year, the United States charged Mufid Elfgeeh, a naturalized American citizen, with recruiting people to try and join ISIS as well as purchasing a firearm, allegedly for use in attacks on returning American soldiers.[52] Elfgeeh was monitored by an informant. Though he allegedly had sought to recruit people to fight in Syria, he had not gone himself.
- In January, the United States filed a criminal complaint charging Christopher Lee Cornell in relation to an alleged plot to attack the U.S. Capitol.[53] According to the complaint, Cornell posted material supportive of ISIS online which led to his being monitored by an informant and eventual arrest.[54]
- In February, the United States charged three Brooklyn men with conspiring to provide material support to ISIS, and in the complaint alleged that the men had discussed potential attacks inside the United States.[55] A fourth Brooklyn man was charged in April in relation to helping fund other group members' alleged plans to travel to fight in Syria.[56] The men were monitored by an informant.[57]
- In March, the United States unsealed charges against Hasan Edmonds, a 22-year-old member of the National Guard, and his cousin Jonas Edmonds alleging that Hasan Edmonds had sought to travel to fight with ISIS and that they had plotted to have Jonas Edmonds conduct an attack against a military facility.[58] The plot was monitored by an undercover officer.[59]
- In April, the United States charged John T. Booker and Alexander Blair with an alleged plot to bomb Fort Riley, in Kansas, in support of ISIS.[60] The two men were monitored by an informant.[61]
- The same month, the United States charged two New York City women, Noelle Velentzas and Asia Siddiqui, in relation to a domestic attack plot in support of ISIS.[62] The two women were monitored by an undercover officer.[63] According to the complaint, Siddiqui had regular contact with members of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.[64] When FBI agents arrested Velentzas and Siddiqui in Queens, they seized propane tanks, soldering tools, a pressure cooker, fertilizer, and bomb making instructions.[65]

In each of the above cases, the alleged plotters were monitored by an informant, which suggests that U.S. law enforcement is doing a good job of staying on top of plots as they develop. Indeed, in February, National Counterterrorism Center Director Nicholas Rasmussen stated that the

threat from terrorists "will remain at its current level resulting in fewer than 10 uncoordinated and unsophisticated plots annually from a pool of up to a few hundred individuals, most of whom are known to the IC [intelligence community] and law enforcement."[66]

This is not to say that ISIS-inspired violence is not a real threat worthy of attention. The requirements for successfully organizing and conducting an act of lone wolf terrorism are much lower than they are for a directed attack from abroad by returning fighters. Individuals inspired by jihadist ideology – but not affiliated with any terrorist group such as Major Nidal Hasan and the Boston Marathon bombers – have killed 26 people in the United States since 9/11.[67] These deaths were tragedies, but not a national catastrophe as 9/11 was.

Finally, policymakers should take care not to "over-Syrianize" the challenge of inspired violence. It is not clear to what extent the current spate of alleged plots are caused by the Syrian conflict and to what extent the Syrian conflict is merely the cause du jour of those plotting attacks. A particularly relevant example is the alleged plot by Noelle Velentzas and Asia Siddiqui. Siddiqi was close to Samir Khan, an American who joined Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in 2006, and she had submitted a poem to *Jihad Recollections* the precursor magazine to *Inspire,* suggesting that ISIS was only the latest of many influences upon her jihadist views.[68] Indeed, Siddiqi had also allegedly expressed support in 2010 for Mohamud Osman Mohamud, who was convicted of plotting to bomb the Portland Christmas Tree ceremony.[69] Given these facts, attributing the plot to ISIS or even simply ISIS's inspirational power rather than a broader challenge of homegrown inspired extremism risks overlooking other sources of threat.

7. A Climate of Fear

In March 2015, 80 percent of Americans believed that ISIS posed a very or fairly serious threat to the United States, according to CNN polling.[70] In September 2014, shortly before President Obama gave a speech laying out his strategy against ISIS, an NBC poll found that almost half of Americans felt the country was less safe now than before 9/11, a larger percentage than it found in September 2002, only one year after the 9/11 attacks.[71]

The American public has an exaggerated sense of the threat posed by fighters returning from Syria. Al-Qaeda has not conducted a successful attack inside the United States since 9/11 and the belief that ISIS poses a threat even greater than al-Qaeda at its height lacks any basis. While speaking at Brookings in September 2014 then-director of the National Counterterrorism Center, Matt Olsen, said there was no credible evidence that ISIS planned to attack the United States; that they lacked the cell structure al-Qaeda had in the 1990s; and that law enforcement had improved since the pre-9/11 era.[72] On February 11, 2015, Francis Taylor, under secretary of the Office of Intelligence and Analysis for the Department of Homeland Security, similarly noted: "At present, we are unaware of any specific, credible, imminent threat to the homeland."[73]

Though a source of concern that needs monitoring and addressing, fighters returning from Syria do not pose a substantial threat to the United States at the moment, and the more likely threat will be from homegrown militants inspired by ISIS or other militant groups. But even in these cases, care is required not to exaggerate the threat. The threats from both returning fighters and ISIS-inspired lone wolves are worrisome, but they are far from existential.

What Can Be Done? Nine Action Items:

1. **Assist Turkish authorities in clamping down on fighters traveling to Syria via Turkey**.

In a Nusra propaganda video released following his death conducting a suicide bombing in Syria last year, Floridian Moner Abu Salha described arriving in Turkey and meeting an al-Qaeda member who took him to a safe house and eventually sent him on into Syria.[74] In the video, Abu Salha said: "From tons of research I knew that mujahideen [holy warriors] come from all around the world, they come to Istanbul. I heard that the Turkey-Syrian border is close."[75] Several Americans who have been arrested for trying to joining ISIS or Nusra were turned back in Turkey. These cases include Donald Morgan of North Carolina, who was stopped by Turkish authorities, and Tairod Pugh of New Jersey, who was stopped in Turkey in January allegedly trying to reach Syria.[76]

It is clear from a 50-page ISIS English language booklet titled *Hijrah*, which ISIS posted online in early 2015, that the organization has begun to feel some pressure from the Turkish government which has been frequently criticized by Western governments for its hitherto lackadaisical approach to controlling the flow of Syria-bound foreign fighters. ISIS explained to potential recruits from around the Muslim world: "It is important to know that the Turkish intelligence agencies are in no way friends of the Islamic State [ISIS]."

Turkish authorities should be encouraged to keep up the pressure on preventing foreign fighters transiting their country and aid should be offered by U.S. Customs and Border Protection for any technical support they may need for this purpose.

2. **Provide off-ramps for susceptible young Americans seduced by ISIS propaganda.**

Right now Muslim-American families who suspect a young family member may be radicalizing or attempting to join ISIS or some other militant group have an unpalatable choice to make: If they seek help from law enforcement their son or daughter can end up being arrested and charged with a crime that carries a long prison term; if they don't alert law enforcement their son or

daughter may travel to Syria where they can be easily killed in the dangerous war being waged there or they can get caught by the FBI attempting to do so and also face a long prison term.

If families felt that the U.S. government might provide some kind of mix of token prison terms; probation; counseling services and some kind supervised release to family members who were radicalizing or thinking of joining ISIS, they would be more incentivized to tell authorities about the radicalization of their loved ones. Such a deal would not be offered to anyone planning some kind of terrorist plot, but could be offered to someone like 19-year-old Mohammed Hamzah Khan of Chicago who had no plan to conduct any terrorist act anywhere but simply wanted to join what he considered to be the perfect Islamic state created by ISIS in Syria and whose case was considered earlier in this testimony.

3. **Educate families about the risks of militant social media.**

Many parents have little understanding of social media or the siren appeal of the propaganda on social media that is put out by ISIS and other Islamist militant groups. Muslim-American leaders and clerics must speak out about this issue.

4. **Ensure social media companies enforce their own Terms of Use.**

Social media platform such as Twitter and Facebook, which are frequently used by ISIS and other militant groups to propagate their propaganda, should be encouraged to enforce their own Terms of Use which prohibit the solicitation of violence and terminate any accounts that encourage violence. Private watchdogs like J.M. Berger (who is also testifying today) have done a good job of putting pressure on social media companies to ensure that this happens.

5. **Crowd out bad speech with better speech.**

It is not, of course, possible to take all ISIS-related content off the Internet; the Internet is just too big. What is possible is to amplify voices with an alternative narrative about the nature of Islam as well as anti-ISIS voices. New America fellow Rabia Chaudry is a Muslim-American lawyer who works with Muslim-American community leaders and imams around the country to help them better understand how to use the Internet as a vehicle to amplify the messages of mainstream Islam. Another New America fellow, Nadia Oweidat, a Jordanian-American who has a doctorate from Oxford in Islamic thought, is collecting and aggregating Arabic language content that satirizes ISIS. Satire can be a powerful weapon to deflate ISIS' claims to be the vanguard of the new caliphate.

6. **Counter-messages against ISIS by the U.S. government.**

The U.S. government can't engage in theological debates with ISIS because of it lack of knowledge of Islamic texts and also is hampered by a significant "kiss of death" problem, which is that the U.S. government has little credibility in key Muslim countries. But U.S. officials can point out as a matter of course that ISIS positions itself as the defender of Islam, yet its victims are overwhelmingly Muslims who don't share its ultra-fundamentalist views to the letter. This observation requires no special knowledge of Islam: It's simply a factual observation, which undercuts ISIS' principal claim that it is the defender of Muslims. The same can also be said about similar terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and its affiliates.

7. **Amplify the stories of disillusioned militants.**

There is likely nothing more powerful to dissuade potential ISIS recruits than hearing the stories of disillusioned militants. The kind of work that former extremist Mubin Shaikh (who is also testifying today) is doing contesting ISIS' messages and engaging with radicalizing individuals is far more valuable than a bunch of nebulous meetings about Countering Violent Extremism (CVE).

8. **Build a database of all the Western foreign fighters who have gone to Syria to fight for ISIS and Nusra.**

Recent research by a leading scholar of jihadism, Thomas Hegghammer, of previous flows of foreign fighters to other jihads found that found that between 1990 and 2010, one in nine Western foreign fighters subsequently became terrorists in the West.[77] This underlines the necessity of understanding of who exactly is fighting in Syria who is from the West.

9. **Stay in Afghanistan beyond 2016.**

One only has to look at the debacle that has unfolded in Iraq after the withdrawal of U.S. troops at the end of 2011 to have a sneak preview of what could take place in an Afghanistan without some kind of residual American presence. Without American forces in the country, there is a strong possibility Afghanistan could host a reinvigorated Taliban allied to a reinvigorated al-Qaeda – not to mention ISIS – which is gaining a foothold in the region. Needless to say, this would be a disaster for Afghanistan. But it would also be quite damaging to U.S. interests to have some kind of resurgent al-Qaeda in the country where the group trained the hijackers for the 9/11 attacks.[78]

Merely because the Obama administration will be almost out the door at the end of 2016 doesn't mean that suddenly at the same time that the Taliban will lay down their arms, or that the Afghan

army will be able to fight the Taliban completely unaided. Nor does it mean that al-Qaeda – and ISIS, which is beginning to establish small cells in Afghanistan – would cease to be a threat.

This U.S. military presence in Afghanistan doesn't have to be a large, nor does it need to play a combat role, but U.S. troops should remain in Afghanistan to advise the Afghan army and provide intelligence support. Such a long-term commitment of several thousand American troops is exactly the kind of force that the Obama administration was forced to deploy to Iraq following ISIS' lightning advances there over the past year. Selling a longer-term U.S. military presence in Afghanistan would be pushing against an open door with that nation's government. Consider that within 24 hours of being installed, the new Afghan government led by President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah signed the basing agreement that allows American troops to stay in Afghanistan until December 2016.

Consider also that the Afghan government has already negotiated a strategic partnership agreement with the United States lasting until 2024 that would provide the framework for a longer term U.S. military presence. Consider also that many Afghans see a relatively small, but long-term international troop presence as a guarantor of their stability. Keeping a relatively small, predominantly U.S. Special Forces presence in Afghanistan to continue to train the Afghan army past December 2016 is a wise policy that would benefit both Afghans and Americans.

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Social Media: An Evolving Front in Radicalization

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The self-styled Islamic State, also known as ISIL or ISIS, is not the first group to employ social media as a tool for recruitment and propaganda, but its innovative and aggressive approach has afforded it an unprecedented level of success, and its activities will likely provide a template for future extremist initiatives.

Since the beginning of 2015, at least 30 Americans in 13 states have been subject to law enforcement action for attempting to join ISIS or carry out violence inspired by ISIS. In every case, a significant social media component was found in the radicalization or recruitment process.

In cases where a clear trajectory could be determined, about one-third of the suspects appear to have been radicalized by al Qaeda-affiliated content prior to the rise of ISIS, and only later shifted allegiance to the Islamic State. The remainder were reportedly radicalized by ISIS directly. While this points to the growing influence of ISIS among those vulnerable to radicalization, it also highlights the fact that this activity takes place in an evolving context, rather than being an entirely new or different problem.

While trends can be detected, those radicalized continue to defy generalization. The majority of those charged were males under the age of 30, but almost 20 percent were women and approximately 30 percent were older than 30. About 30 percent of the cases involved some discussion of a violent plot in the United States, with most of the remainder involving efforts to travel to Syria and join ISIS there.

The role of global social media has made it possible for adherents of even the most outlying extremist ideologies to connect and communicate. In addition, the increasing ease of global travel makes it possible for the most committed and fanatical to gather in specific geographical locations.

Furthermore, a proliferation of technologies for inflicting mass casualties empower those who are frustrated in their efforts to travel to Iraq and Syria to act violently at home, often with outsized consequences that echo through the 24-hour news cycle.

In the blunt numerical context of a world with 7 billion people or a Twitter monthly active user base of 302 million, active supporters of ISIS barely register. They represent a fraction of 1 percent of Muslims worldwide, and an even smaller fraction of the world's population.

But when adherents of a violent ideology can connect and communicate swiftly and easily, these tiny percentages add up to hundreds or even thousands of people who can congregate or act in loose concert, exerting a disproportionate impact on global politics and world events. Social media is a critical tool for organizing such activity.

There are three major components to ISIS's social media campaign.

The first is disseminating propaganda to generate support for the group and attract potential recruits and supporters locally and abroad.

The second is disseminating propaganda designed to manipulate its enemies' perceptions and political reactions. While some of this material purports to demoralize and deter potential enemies from taking action, its real intent is often to inflame animosity and engage foreign countries in a wider regional war. Some of this propaganda also aims to undermine the unity of the coalition opposing ISIS. Its terrorist actions are synchronized with this goal.

The third major component is recruitment. Here, the broad strokes of ISIS's highly visible propaganda campaign give way to a host of smaller, individualized activities.

Due to its unusually large size (in the context of extremist groups) and its large contingent of foreign fighters, ISIS can attack the recruiting problem using a wide variety of tactics, with staffing levels that allow for a very high ratio of radicalizers to potential recruits.

ISIS has cultivated recruiters and radicalizers who speak the native languages of Western countries. In some cases, as in Minnesota, supporters and recruiters work on the ground and synchronize their bricks-and-mortar operations with online outreach. In

other cases, it pursues purely online initiatives, benefiting from the sense of remote intimacy that comes with constant contact using always-on media.

These approaches are detectable in open sources, up to a point, although recruits who reach a critical decision-making stage are often shifted off of public social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to private social media such as Kik and WhatsApp, where interactions cannot be directly observed using open-source tools.

In Garland, Texas, on May 3, 2015, two apparent ISIS supporters were killed attempting to attack an event that involved drawing the Prophet Mohammed. A police officer was wounded.

ISIS supporters online had openly urged attacks on the event for more than a week prior, and while the attack was thwarted, it was not prevented.

The challenge in such cases is separating the signal from the noise. ISIS supporters online generate a very substantial amount of noise, yet it is relatively uncommon for a specific attack to be so clearly reflected in data preceding its execution. Therefore caution should be exercised when relying on open-source intelligence to anticipate attacks. ISIS supporters are likely to become more vocally threatening if they believe U.S. law enforcement will allocate resources every time they name a specific target.

The increasing disruption of ISIS's most visible propaganda activities -- on platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and increasingly Twitter -- has decreased its ability to broadcast its message to the widest possible audiences. The crackdown by social media providers has created tradeoffs in detecting recruitment.

When broader propaganda efforts are disrupted, recruitment increasingly shifts to a peer-to-peer model of individual relationships. For instance, one of the most commonly observed interactions involves foreign fighters in Syria speaking directly to vulnerable young people in the U.S. using private Facebook messages. This activity is harder to detect in open-source, but not necessarily impossible. New and better techniques are needed to identify both recruiters and at-risk populations.

But while detection and interdiction for purposes of countering violent extremism become more labor-intensive as a result of suspensions, these disruptions also increase the amount of time and energy ISIS must expend to find and attract new recruits. Adherents are persistent in returning to the field with new accounts, an activity that can

be countered more effectively but probably cannot be entirely defeated. The bottom line: Extremist activity on social media cannot be eliminated, it can only be weakened.

Current efforts to counter ISIS activity are inhibited by two key challenges.

The first is commitment. ISIS supporters rarely tire of promoting their message, and they are not easily deterred. Faced with an aggressive spike in suspensions on Twitter, they have mounted a variety of labor-intensive countermeasures that keep them in the game, albeit at a reduced level.

The process of reporting pro-ISIS users for suspension requires a steady and ongoing commitment. Twitter suspensions are reportedly based primarily on user reporting of abusive content. If the reporters get bored or distracted, the network gains time to regenerate. Only a consistent effort will produce a consistent result, but the current level of pressure is certainly having some effect.

This leads us to the second challenge, which is the near total outsourcing of anti-ISIS activity online. To date, the vast majority of Twitter abuse reporting is apparently done by hacktivists. The largest and most organized efforts to counter ISIS online, either through reporting or the spread of competing messages, include:

- "Anonymous," an amorphous collection of anonymous vigilantes, including significant numbers who engage in unrelated illegal or antigovernment activities.
- Foreign and domestic activist networks and political groups that are predicated on anti-Muslim sentiment, at times including the language of overt bigotry.
- Foreign government influence operations, such as Russian, Syrian and Iranian programs, whose operations include substantial activity adversarial to U.S. foreign policy and inimical to our national security.
- Other hacktivists of unknown origin who deploy spam techniques and malware against ISIS online. Recent examples include content that appears to originate in Japan and Saudi Arabia, but may be deliberately misleading as to its origins.

Similar to the bricks-and-mortar military coalition against ISIS, members of these networks have a variety of motives for participating, not all of them consistent with American values, or our security and foreign policy goals.

A great many Muslim voices oppose ISIS and its values on a daily basis, however these efforts tend to be organic, rather than highly organized campaigns, especially

in English. While such individual voices are crucially important, Muslims seeking to counter ISIS should also pursue more organized strategies. Within the Muslim-American community, programs are already in development to address this gap.

If the U.S. government wishes to directly counter ISIS online, such initiatives will require latitude to engage in trial and error. Programs must be prepared to produce and disseminate extremely high volumes of content. In the current political environment, where back-seat drivers and courters of controversy are found in abundance, this is a difficult proposition.

Government efforts are also subject to limitations on how we conduct information operations, or more bluntly, propaganda. Liberal democracies require that such operations be truthful and acknowledge the concerns of multiple constituencies. And activities undertaken on social media, especially in English, are subject to high levels of scrutiny and instant critique.

Any efforts to move forward in this space must create opportunities for experimentation and allow room for missteps. I am not optimistic that this administration and this Congress are capable of giving a government agency the latitude necessary to successfully undertake a more aggressive approach.

Unfortunately, this means the burden falls on volunteers, activists and community groups. As noted above, private sector players who are currently most active in countering ISIS bring a lot of baggage to the process. Furthermore, private sector groups often lack the funding and manpower needed to be effective. ISIS deploys thousands of activists to promote its messages on a daily basis. To be effective against ISIS, we must be prepared to deploy similar numbers.

Some of the limitations I have discussed here may be surmountable. If they are not, we are left with relatively few options.

First, we can continue under the current scenario, which is already having a detrimental effect on the performance of ISIS online networks.

Second, we can find ways to incentivize private sector participation in anti-ISIS initiatives. There are considerable complications here, including the fact that government support (either moral or financial) can delegitimize organizations working to counter violent extremism in the eyes of their target audiences. The

government's expectations of potential partners also limit the field. For instance, it is doubtful government-supported activists would be permitted to engage in frank discussions about politically sensitive U.S. policies that are important to target audiences.

Third, we can create government information programs that involve a large number of accounts focused on generating substantial volumes of anti-ISIS activity online, while taking a conservative and limited approach to the content. As the example of Russian online propaganda demonstrates, there are benefits to simply injecting noise into contested online spaces, but such efforts must take place at a very fast tempo in order to have an effect. A modest success in this space may also help pave the way for more innovative efforts in the future.

Fourth, we can deploy intelligence and other reporting assets to expose the current standard of living within ISIS territories. Recent news reports suggest deteriorating conditions in major centers such as Raqqa and Mosul, but these are based mainly on eyewitness accounts. To counter ISIS's highly visual propaganda, we must obtain and distribute images and video that undermines its extensive propaganda depiction of a high-functioning state. This step is critical to undercutting ISIS's powerful millenarian appeal.

In conclusion, it is important to remember that the study of social media is relatively new and rapidly evolving. Unpredictable outcomes are inevitable in highly interconnected networks. While social network analysis offers great promise as a way to understand the world, we are still at an early stage in determining which approaches work. ISIS's social media campaign has evolved and adapted significantly over the course of its short history, and if we seek to meet them on the online battlefield, we must do the same.

To the Esteemed Members of the United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

In the matter related to the hearing titled, "Jihad 2.0: Social Media in the Next Evolution of Terrorist Recruitment."

Submission by Mr. Mubin Shaikh

On September 11, 2001 I was driving to work when I first heard a plane had struck one of the two towers of the World Trade Center building. Immediately, I exclaimed aloud, "AllahuAkbar" (God is Great). My celebratory moment was quickly muted when I asked myself; what if the very office building I was working in, was similarly struck by a plane? I would have perished along with everyone else just as those innocent people perished on that day. For me and many others, September 11, 2001 was – for all intents and purposes – the beginning of the end of my commitment to the extremist mindset.

Allow me to explain how I even got here in the first place.

I was born and raised in Toronto, Canada to Indian immigrants. As a child, I grew up attending a very conservative brand of "Madressah," which was an imported version of what you would find in India and Pakistan: rows of boys (separated from the girls) sitting at wooden benches, rocking back and forth, reciting the Quran in Arabic but not understanding a word of what was being read.

Contrast that with my daily life of attending public school, which was the complete opposite of the rigid, fundamentalist manner of education of the Madressah. Here, I could actually talk to girls and have a normal, functional relationship with them without it being some grievous sin. When I left the Madressah at age 12 and moved into middle school and high school, I was not discriminated against, bullied, picked on or anything of the like. I was actually one of the cool kids and so were my friends.

But something happened in 1994 when I was 17. I had a house party while my parents were away, which my hyper-conservative uncle walked in on. Normal as it may be to the Western experience, my uncle and other family members were incensed that I would have brought non-Muslim friends to my home and they spent the next few days berating me over what I had done. Due to the sustained guilt-trip I received, the only way I thought I could make amends with my family, was to "get religious."

I would then travel to India and Pakistan and in the latter, ended up in a place called Quetta, which – unbeknownst to me at the time – was the center of the Taliban Shura and of the group known as Al Qaeda. As I walked around the area, I chanced upon 10 heavily armed men dressed in black turbans, flowing robes and sandals. One of them said to me that if you truly wish to bring about political change, it can only be done by using this: and he held aloft his AK47. I was completely enamored by them as Jihadi heroes (a consistent theme in Jihadist literature/media today) and when I returned to Canada in the fall of 1995, I was fully in the mindset of a militant Jihadist. In the years following, I absorbed myself in proclaiming the political and military disasters that had befallen the Muslim world and that "Jihad" was the only way to change things. When Osama Bin Laden gave his fatwa in 1998, I was on board with whatever had to be done.

Then 9/11 happened and I thought: wait a second, I understand the notion of attacking combatants but this? Office buildings in which regular people worked – Muslims included? No, something was fundamentally wrong about this and so, I realized I needed to study the religion of Islam properly to make sense of what I had just witnessed. I sold my belongings and moved to Syria in early 2002 when there was still some semblance of normality in the country. I attended the class of a Syrian Islamic scholar who challenged me on my views regarding "Jihad" and subsequently, spent a year and a half with him studying the verses of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon All God's Prophets) that the Jihadists used to justify their hate and destruction. After learning some Arabic and Islamic Studies, I came to relinquish my views completely, was filled with great regret over the young people I had myself recruited to "the cause" and returned to Canada in 2004.

In 2004, some individuals in the UK had been arrested on terrorism charges in conjunction with the London fertilizer bomb plot. One of those individuals was none other than my classmate from the Madressah I attended as a child – Momin Khawaja, the first Canadian charged under new counter terrorism laws in the country. I thought this to be a mistake and contacted the Canadian Security Intelligence Service to give a character reference for the family but it was too late for him. As for me, I would agree to work with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service as an undercover operator to help keep Canadians safe because I felt now, this was my religious duty.

I can say that for almost 2 years following my recruitment by the Service, I conducted several infiltration operations both online and on the ground involving religious extremists. In late 2005, one of those cases moved on to become a criminal investigation and I traversed from CSIS to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police – Integrated National Security Enforcement Team in what came to be known as the Toronto 18 terrorism prosecution. I gave Fact Witness testimony in 5 hearings over 4 years at the Superior Court of Ontario. 11 individuals were eventually convicted.

Since my work experience, I have committed myself to assisting governments of the West, especially the various mechanisms of the U.S. government including the National Counter Terrorism Center, Homeland Security (Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties) and the U.S. Department of State, Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications – three main outfits that are engaged in the study and practice of countering violent extremism (CVE) programming.

In addition, I have spent the past few years on Twitter having watched the very start of the Foreign Fighter phenomenon and directly observed recruitment and propaganda by ISIS types online (**See APPENDIX A**). I have directly engaged with many of them – some of whom are now deceased – male and female (**See APPENDIX B**) as well as some of their victims that they have tried to recruit. My approach is to show how wrong they are and to criticize and delegitimize them from the very Islamic sources that they misquote and mutilate. Thusly, the correct term to describe these TIC's (Terrorists in Islamic Costume) is, KHAWARIJ (**See APPENDIX C**). I have personally intervened in cases of even an America girl (**see APPENDIX D**) that these predators were trying to lure away and put a stop to it by engaging her online as someone who can show her the real interpretation of Islam. Due to this, I have an excellent understanding of what is happening in terms of recruitment and what needs to be done in terms of counter messaging, both from the civic service and NGO side as well as the military side of psychological operations, and I gave a presentation to this effect, at a Special Operations Command

conference in which Commanding General Votel himself was present. There remains a massive gap in all the areas above that I have mentioned and that a sustainable, meaningful and effective counter-messaging approach needs to be created. I submit to you it is not as hard as some may suggest, that we already have talent that just need the direction and guidance in order to get it going.

Finally, as to the conflicting reports of terrorist recruitment in prisons, I submit to you 3 short statements:

1. Terrorist recruitment in prisons is happening all over the world, not just in the U.S. but as for the U.S., the numbers are very, very low as opposed to more volatile places like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan and others.

2. In the Western context, much of this recruiting remains unseen to the untrained eye (and also due to its covert nature) and usually does not manifest openly in the prison institution but afterwards, when the individual has left the facility.

3. Greater vetting of the types of Imams that offer counselling is needed to ensure that pro-social messaging is delivered in the context of prison rehabilitation programs. By framing this under "pro-social" messaging, the state avoids having to declare which version of Islam they "approve" of since we all approve of anything that tends to have healthy, productive and rehabilitative components of counselling.

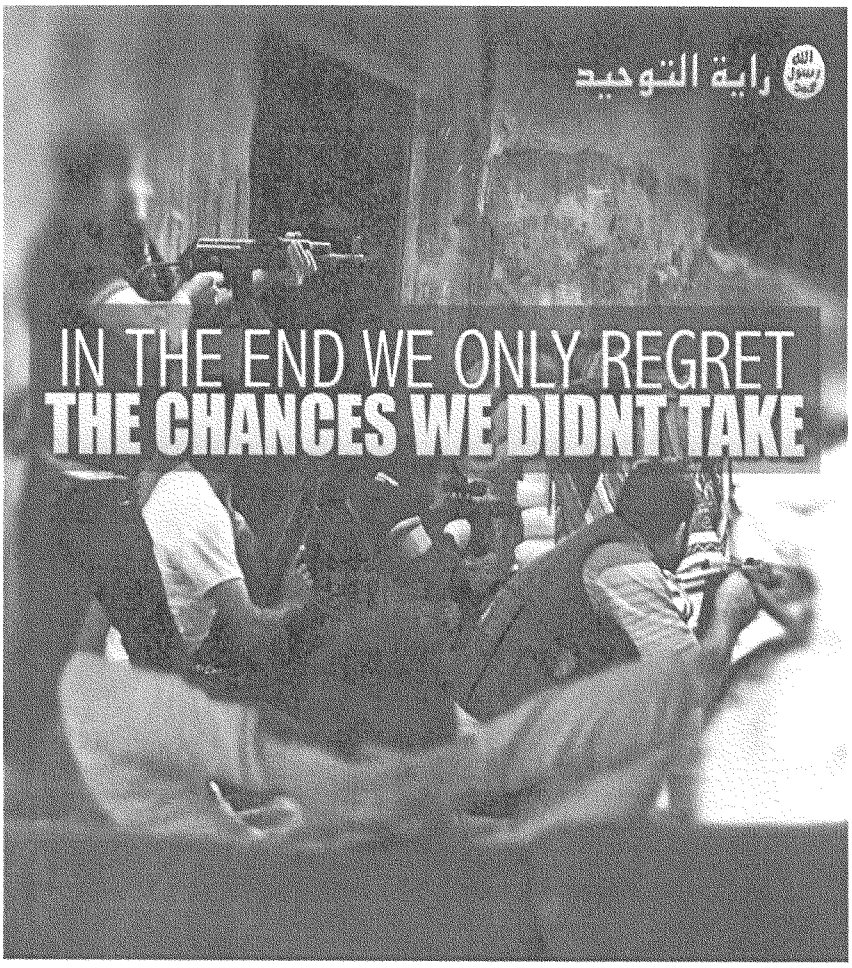
I thank the committee and my colleagues here with me and hope this is the start of a fruitful discussion in dealing with the challenges and opportunities now before us. Thank you.

APPENDIX A

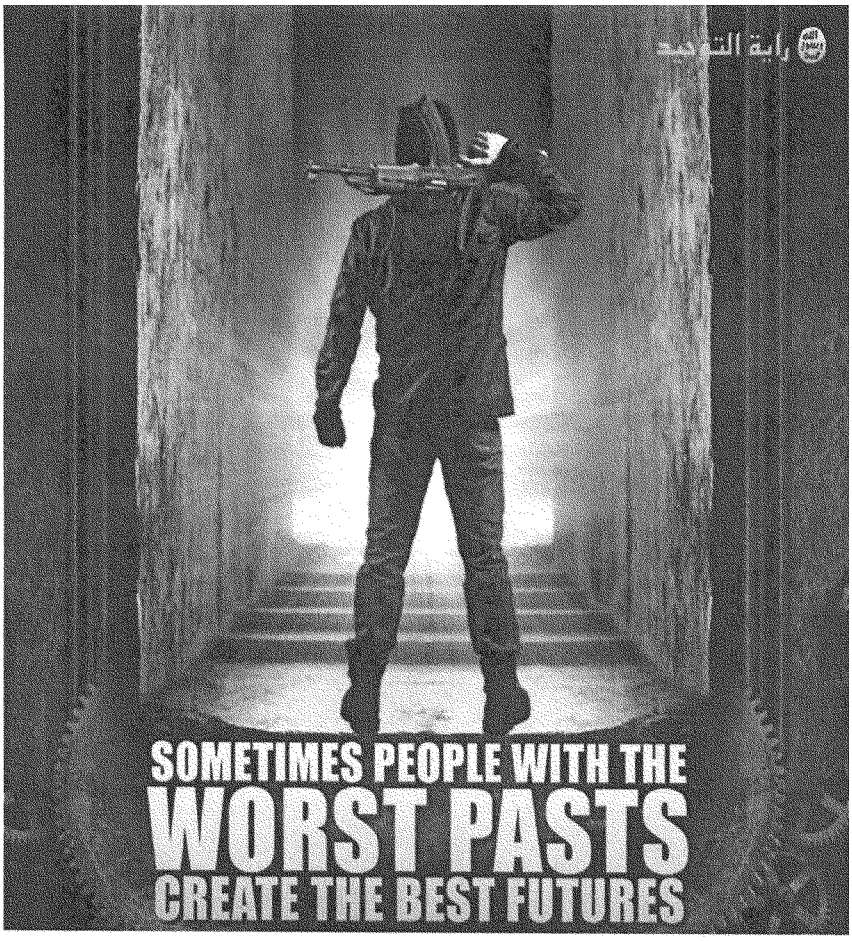
PRO-AL QAEDA & ISIS MESSAGING TARGETING WESTERN YOUTH



Here, individuals have taken the ADDIDAS logo and turned it into Al Qaeda. You will notice the plane flying into the blocks that make up the logo.



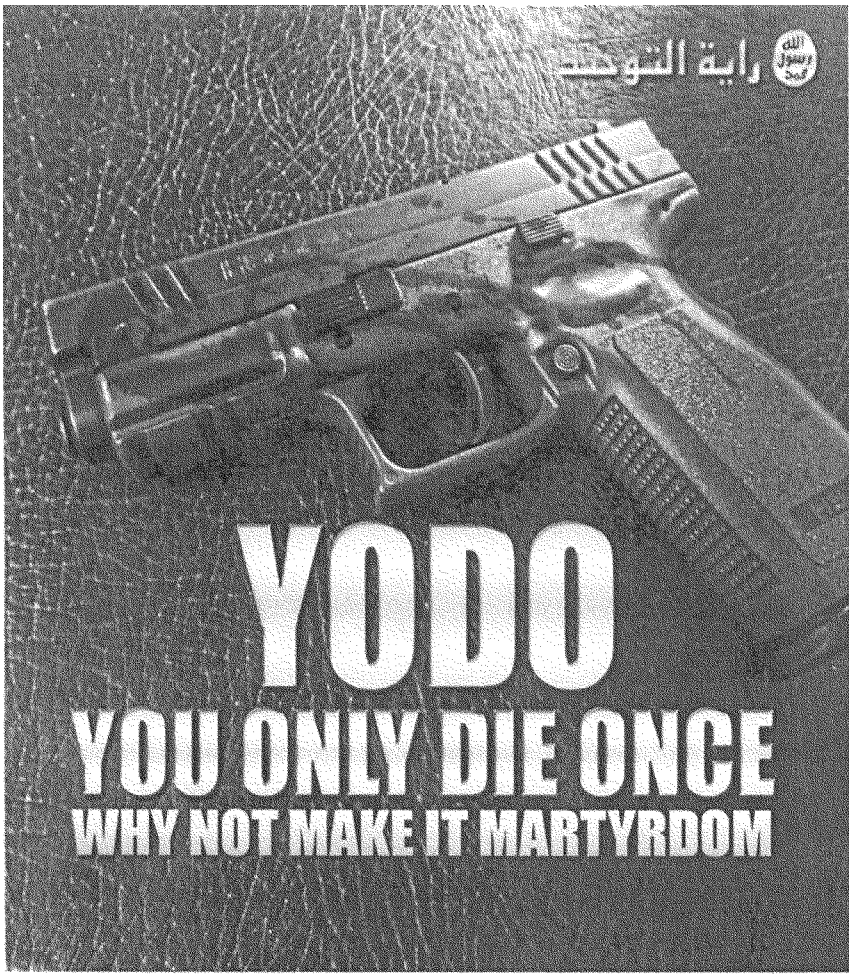
This is to appeal to those who may be on the fence in regards to going to join ISIS and playing on the idea of them perhaps missing out on what their friends are now enjoying.



The idea here is to recruit individuals who already have a propensity to commit violence but need a cause to frame their violence in. Alternatively, it also appeals to those who may feel they have lived a very sinful life and the only way to make amends, is to join the Jihad and basically, reinvent themselves as vanguards of the righteous few.



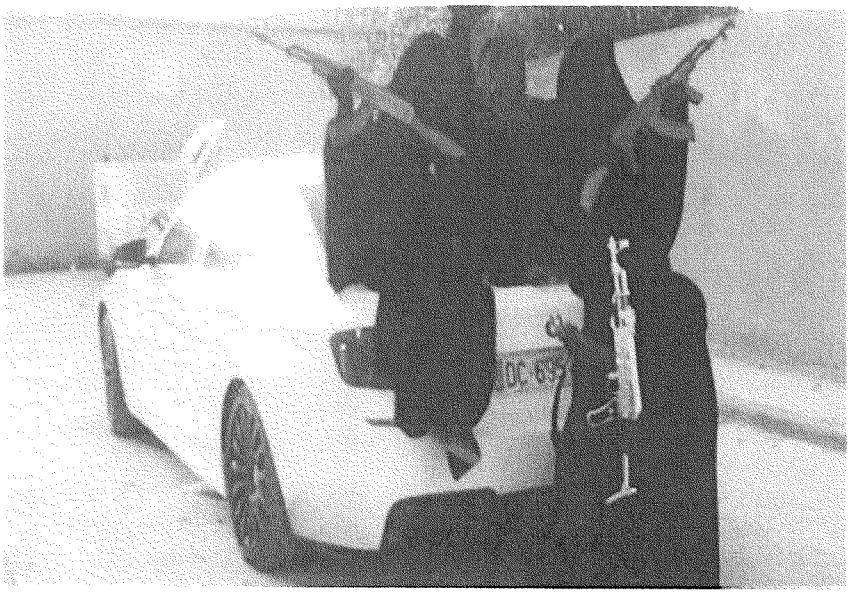
In the game, Call of Duty, when an individual is killed their character will "respawn" and reanimate back to life. Here, the propagandist is tying the idea of respawning from the game, with the Islamic belief of bodily resurrection in the Afterlife.



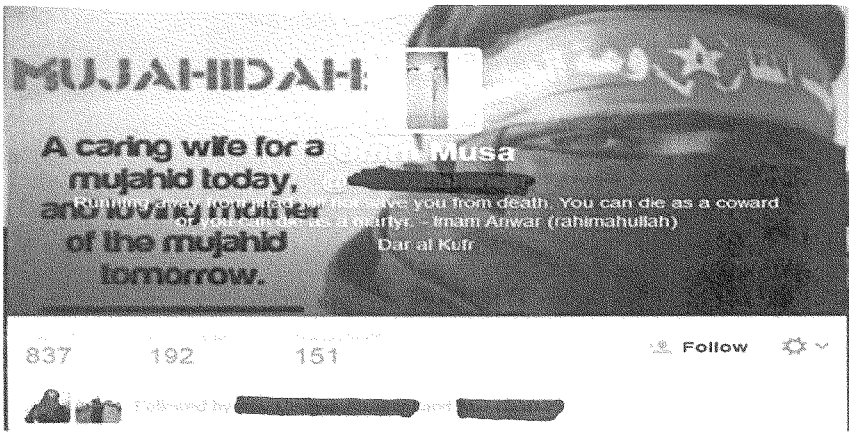
This is a play on the youth culture phrase of "YOLO" (You Only Live Once). Here, the concept is flipped away from pursuing worldly pleasure and seeking "martyrdom" (living forever essentially) by death.

APPENDIX B

WOMEN OF ISIS



Women from Australia – two of whom went with their husbands and who were eventually killed in combat – posing and bragging online, trying to perpetuate the "Jihadi Cool" factor.



The saying sums up how the women see their role: as the wife of a fighter today and mother to the fighters of tomorrow. This is one main reason ISIS has begun to use children in their videos: to tell you that even if you do come to fight us, you will find yourselves having to fire at kids.



Following the attacks in France at Charlie Hebdo, "Je Suis Kouachi" (I am Kouachi – the two brothers who committed the attack) was posted by this female ISIS supporter.



Portrayed as a "Jihadi Romance" story – complete with media interviews of two foreign fighters. The text reads: "The love of Jannah" (the love of Paradise") and "Till Martyrdom do us part." The male was killed in combat.

APPENDIX C

SPECIFIC RELIGIOUS SCRIPTURE USED TO DELEGITIMIZE ISIS

Imam Abu Bakr al-Ajurri said: "The scholars old and new have not differed about the fact that Khawarij are an evil people who disobey Allah (swt) and who disobey RasulAllah (saw) eventhough they may fast, pray and strive hard in worship. So that is of no benefit to them, eventhough they outwardly display enjoining the good and prohibiting the evil but that does not benefit them because they explain the Qur'an to mean whatever they desire and whatever falsify to the Muslims. Indeed Allah (awj) has warned against them, RasulAllah (saw) has warned against them, the rightly guided caliphs after him have warned against them, the companions and those who followed them in goodness have warned against them." (ash-Shariah 31)

- The "Khawarij" were an ancient sect in early Islam who were declared deviants due to their declaring other Muslims as Apostates and thus, killing them. They prayed, fasted and for all intents and purposes, appeared to be Muslim but they have been castigated as being "out of the fold" of Islam for what they do.
- ISIS doesn't really care for "ISIS" or "ISIL" or "IS" or even "DAESH" but you will see why they hate the use of the label, Khawarij.

Yusair ibn Amr reported: I said to Sahl ibn Hunaif, "Have you heard anything about the rebels (*khawarij*) from the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him?" Sahl said, "I heard the Prophet saying while pointing with his hand towards Iraq: **There will appear in it some people who will recite the Quran but it will not go beyond their throats, and they will go out from Islam just as an arrow pierces through its target.**"

Source: Sahih Bukhari 6535

Grade: ***Sahih*** (authentic) according to Al-Bukhari

يُسَيْرُ بْنُ عَمْرٍو قَالَ قُلْتُ لِسَهْلِ بْنِ حُنَيْفٍ هَلْ سَمِعْتَ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ فِي الْخَوَارِجِ شَيْئًا قَالَ سَمِعْتُهُ يَقُولُ وَأَهْوَى بِيَدِهِ قِبَلَ الْعِرَاقِ **يَخْرُجُ مِنْهُ قَوْمٌ يَقْرَءُونَ الْقُرْآنَ لَا يُجَاوِزُ تَرَاقِيَهُمْ يَمْرُقُونَ مِنَ الْإِسْلَامِ مُرُوقَ السَّهْمِ مِنَ الرَّمِيَّةِ**

صحيح البخاري كِتَاب اسْتِتَابَةِ الْمُرْتَدِّينَ وَالْمُعَانِدِينَ وَقِتَالِهِمْ فِيهِ أصحاب يحقر أحدكم صلاته مع صلاته وصيامه مع صيامه 6535
يمرقون من الدين كما يمرق السهم من الرمية

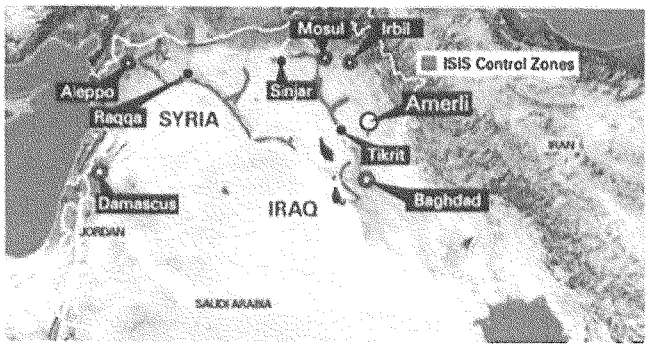
- Here, the Khawarij are referred to as having left the religion. That they quote the Quran but it does not pass their throats (that is, they are superficial and have no depth in their understanding).

There are many sahih ahadith narrated concerning killing the Khawarij. RasulAllah (saw) said: "Tooba is for those who kill them (the Khawarij) or who are killed by them." (Ahmad, Ibn Sad, Ibn Abi Asim, Sunnah; Lailaki, Sharh usulul itiqad) "They are most evil of creation." (Muslim) "Whosoever encounters them let him kill them, since there is a reward on the Day of Judgment for the one who kills them." (Bukhari; Muslim) "The Khawarij are the dogs of hellfire." (from Abi Awfa by Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja, Ahmad, Ibn Asim as-Sunnah, Abdullah ibn Ahmad b Hanbal, as-Sunnah and from Abu Uthman al-Bahili by Tirmidhi, Abdurrazzaq, al-Musannaf; Ibn Abi Shaybah, Musannaf, Tabarani, Mujamul Kabeer; Tabarani, al-Awsat; Tabarari, as-Sagher; Hakim, Mustadrak; Bayhaqi, as-Sunanul Kubra)

- Here, the Prophet (PeaceBeUponHim) refers to the Khawarij in the most derisive terms ever given to a group. His order is very clear: they are to be killed.

'There shall appear a group of people from my Umma in the direction of the east. They will recite the Qur'an but it will not pass their throats. Every time a generation of them appears it will be cut down.....- ***until the Anti-Christ appears from their last remnants.***' – [al-Musnad, al-Mustadrak, and others]

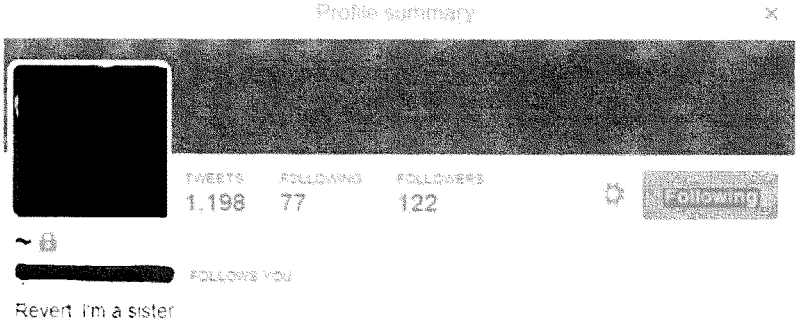
- Muslims believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (PeaceBeUponHim). Prior to the coming of the Messiah who shall rule with full authority and power, the Antichrist must emerge. This statement indicates that from the last remnants of the Khawarij, the very Antichrist himself shall emerge.



- A Prophetic statement goes on to say: "The Antichrist shall emerge on the road between Iraq and Syria." There is now a physical road between the two countries, made by ISIS itself. Thus, my counter messaging to them suggests that they are in fact, the Antichrist army.

APPENDIX D

*Case study of an American girl living in the state of Washington, who has Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, who lives with her elderly grandparents, who was being lured by ISIS recruiters online. I was tagged into some tweets in which some individuals suggested I talk to her and I proceeded to engage her to talk her out of a life-destroying choice.



- I have left the image of the girl (top right) along with her siblings to show you how brazen these recruiters can be. I hope this image shall not be made public so as to protect her privacy. There is also an active FBI case on this file.



- Here is a screenshot of my initial attempts. Notice first how she frames this under, "they care about me" (because she is somewhat developmentally delayed and emotionally immature and will gravitate to whomever fawns over her). Secondly, she refers to verses from the Quran that they gave her. I then challenged her on producing these verses they use (so I could debunk their interpretation).



- At first she is still somewhat resistant and may have been taken aback by my aggressive approach but now I tell her directly, that I used to be an extremist – that I know the verses they use so I continue to challenge her on that point about verses from the Quran.

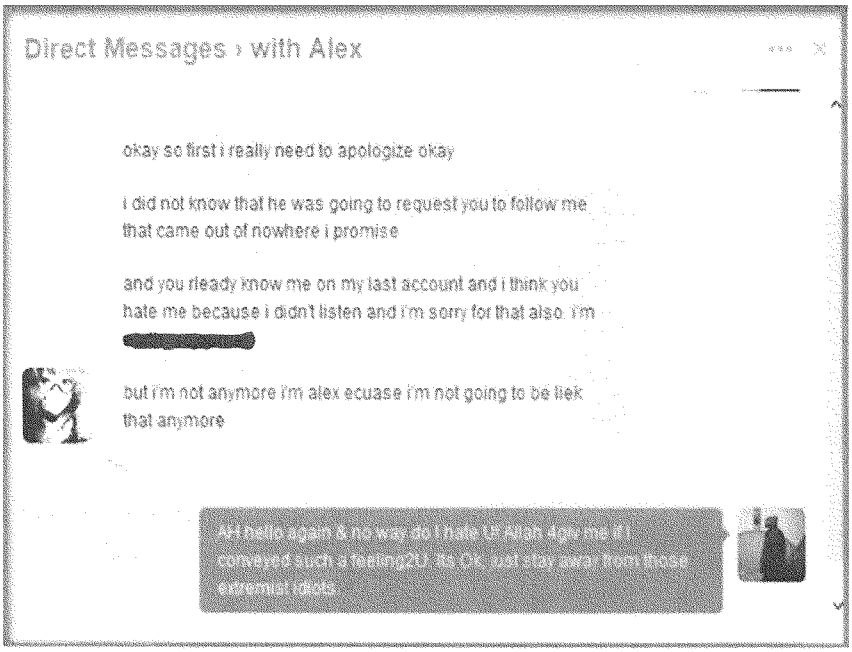
[redacted] I'm sincere when I say they've always been kind to me but they read the messages I knew they would and got mad

Mubin Shaikh

[redacted]- Their kindness was a fake cover 2 draw U in & then lure U over. They're predators. Devils, in fact.

1 2

- Here you see again that the recruiters use kindness and even "love" that the girl is probably not getting (parents are gone, she is now with grandparents) or being made to feel special. I reinforce the point that they are fake and are trying to lure her over.



- After sustained intervention with this girl and the support by her grandmother, even an FBI visit, she has broken away from that recruiting cell who had been mailing her chocolates and staying up for over 10 hours online, trying to lure her over. This is – so far – a success story but how many stories have we heard/read about just in the past month where the opposite has been the case. The case remains with the FBI as an active file not on the girl but on the individual in the UK who has been grooming her as child sex predators also tend to do.

*** What I have included above in the Appendices are only samples of the interactions I have had over the past few years of the ISIS Foreign Fighter phenomenon. I have hundreds of screenshots that are arranged in the categories above. For the sake of brevity I have included some of the more important examples but upon your request, a fuller presentation can be delivered to the Committee if you so desire.

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Senate Testimony

Jihad 2.0:
Social Media in the Next Evolution of Terrorist Recruitment

Daveed Gartenstein-Ross
Senior Fellow, Foundation for Defense of Democracies
Chief Executive Officer, Valens Global

Hearing before the
Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs

Washington, DC
May 7, 2015

FDD
FOUNDATION FOR DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES
1726 M Street NW • Suite 700 • Washington, DC 20036

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Carper, and distinguished members of the committee, on behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, it is an honor to appear before you to discuss the jihadist use of social media, and what can the government can do to address this challenge.[1]

This testimony focuses on the Islamic State (IS), which has taken strategic communications by a jihadist group to an entirely new level. The proficiency of IS and its supporters as communicators can be discerned from the group's production of tightly choreographed and slickly produced videos, from its apparently deep understanding of how to catch the Western media's attention, and from IS's exceptionally skilled coordinated distribution of its content on platforms like Twitter.[2] The group's leap forward in reaching its various target audiences is of great concern. Through the strength of its communications, IS has helped inspire unprecedented numbers of young Muslims from across the globe to flock to the battlefields of Syria and Iraq to fight on the group's behalf.[3] IS has provoked a wave of lone wolf terrorist attacks that raises legitimate questions about whether extremists' savvy use of social media might produce a permanent rise in lone wolf terrorism.[4] Not only has IS eclipsed the communications skills of its predecessors in the jihadist movement, but it is also widely perceived (rightly so) as winning its propaganda war against the United States and other Western powers.

The key argument I will advance is that underneath the hard shell that the Islamic State has cultivated through its propaganda campaign exists a soft underbelly: IS has become entirely dependent on the success of its messaging, yet the group's propaganda is vulnerable to disruption. IS's flawed military strategy has left it surrounded by foes, and fighting wars on several fronts. As IS has made more and more enemies, ranging from the nation states bombing its convoys to the shadowy vigilantes killing IS officials in the territory it controls,[5] IS's propaganda operations have become the key to preventing its overstretched caliphate from experiencing even greater setbacks.

Even if the U.S. government is able to undermine IS's strategic communications campaign, that is not the same thing as defeating the attractiveness of the broader jihadist movement's message. For reasons that this testimony will outline, IS—despite its technically excellent communication—possesses weaknesses that the jihadist movement does not overall. Nonetheless,

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[1] I recently completed a study commissioned by the consulting firm Wikistrat examining how the U.S. government can undercut the Islamic State's messaging. See Daveed Gartenstein-Ross & Nathaniel Barr, *The Winner's Messaging Strategy of the Islamic State: Technically Excellent, Vulnerable to Disruption* (unpublished manuscript, forthcoming 2015, Wikistrat). This testimony is largely adapted from that forthcoming study. I would like to thank my co-author Nathaniel Barr for his top-notch work on this project.

As to the term "jihadist," how to describe the movement of which both the Islamic State and al-Qaeda are a part is a topic of some contention amongst researchers. I employ the term "jihadist" in this testimony in large part because it is an organic term, the way that those within the movement refer to themselves. As the terrorism researcher Jarret Brachman notes, this label has "been validated as the least worst option" linguistically for referring to this movement "across the Arabic-speaking world," including being employed in Arabic-language print and broadcast media. See Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 5.

[2] See, e.g., J.M. Berger, "How ISIS Games Twitter," *The Atlantic*, June 16, 2014.

[3] See Peter R. Neumann, "Foreign Fighter Total in Syria/Iraq Now Exceeds 20,000; Surpasses Afghanistan Conflict in the 1980s," International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (London), January 26, 2015, http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/.

[4] See Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "What Does the Recent Spate of Lone Wolf Terrorist Attacks Mean?", *War on the Rocks*, October 27, 2014.

[5] Sam Kiley, "Underground Guerrilla Force Battles IS in Mosul," *Sky News*, April 21, 2015.

weakening IS's impressive strategic communications campaign would be a significant victory for the U.S., and would represent a first step toward better understanding the battlefield of social media in which the United States will be forced to compete with jihadists, and other varieties of extremist groups, in the future.

This testimony begins by exploring how IS's communications strategy depends upon projecting an image of strength. It explores the ways that IS has sought to project that image, including through exaggeration and fraudulent means. Finally, the testimony concludes by providing a framework through which the United States can focus on IS's key vulnerability by undercutting that image of strength.

The Islamic State's Need to Project an Image of Strength

As IS has lost territory in Syria and Iraq and its supply of foreign fighters has precipitously declined—only around 120 foreign fighters joined its ranks in the first three months of this year[6]—IS has focused its messaging efforts on adding new affiliates internationally. There are many ways that drawing in additional affiliates gives IS a lifeline. New affiliates feed into the perception that IS is an indomitably growing force even if it is experiencing setbacks in Iraq. The Islamic State hopes to gain operationally by drawing new groups into its orbit, as IS may be able to compensate for its loss of foreign fighters by drawing manpower from these affiliates, and may be able to secure additional funding sources this way as well. And international expansion ensures the organization's survivability even if it loses its hold over broad swathes of Iraq or even Syria. IS's propaganda has been critical to this international growth, such the brutal Nigerian jihadist group Boko Haram's decision to pledge *bayat* (an oath of allegiance) to IS in March 2015.[7]

The comments of former and current American officials suggest that IS has fashioned such a powerful propaganda apparatus that it could take the United States years to formulate a "counter-narrative" capable of undermining the group's appeal.[8] This view, however, conflates IS's appeal with that of the jihadist movement as a whole: They are not the same, and the former is easier to counter than the latter. Although IS obviously strikes many of the same themes as do other jihadist groups, conflating the narrative of IS as an organization with that of the broader movement causes practitioners and observers to overlook a central vulnerability in IS's propaganda efforts: IS's communications can be described as a "winner's message" at a time that it is, on the whole, losing. That is, IS's messaging depends on the group projecting an image of strength and momentum—and if IS's narrative is undermined or disrupted in this regard, then IS risks becoming unattractive to its target audience.

That is precisely what happened to IS's predecessor, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Like IS, AQI also had a winner's message that involved the use of extraordinary brutality, including releasing videos in which its hostages were humiliated and beheaded. From 2005-07, the combination of this brutality and AQI's battlefield successes made AQI perhaps the most prominent jihadist organization in the world, with many observers arguing that its emir Abu Musab al-Zarqawi had eclipsed Osama bin Laden, the emir of the overall al-Qaeda organization, in prominence. But

[6] "Islamic State Recruits 400 Children Since January: Syria Monitor," Reuters, March 24, 2015.
[7] See Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "The Islamic State's African Long Con," *Foreign Policy*, March 16, 2015 (explaining how IS's propaganda efforts were important to luring Boko Haram into its network).
[8] See comments in Simon Cottee, "Why It's So Hard to Stop ISIS Propaganda," *The Atlantic*, March 2, 2015.

AQI's excesses pushed many Iraqi Sunni tribes to support the *Sahwa* (Awakening) movement that stood up against AQI's power. Sunni tribal engagement played an important role in AQI's defeat in 2007-08, and AQI's brutality shifted from a potent symbol of the group's power to a demonstration of how it had overplayed its hand.[9]

Though the projection of strength is central to IS's communications strategy, much of the anti-IS messaging efforts attempted to date by the U.S. and its allies have focused on aspects of the group's narrative that are less critical to the organization and also more difficult to counter. Indeed, at times the counter-IS narrative and IS's own narrative have been *exactly the same*: Anti-IS messaging has often emphasized the jihadist group's brutality, while IS also proudly proclaims its own brutality. The Islamic State is content to flaunt the atrocities it commits because, while many people will find its messaging distasteful, that bloody imagery also projects the group's power.

Fortunately, IS *has* been experiencing significant setbacks, though the group hasn't yet lost control of its narrative of victory.[10] A counter-messaging strategy focused on undermining IS's image of strength and momentum is the best approach for the Islamic State's foes. In launching such a campaign, the U.S. needs to adapt some of its internal processes that stand in the way of competing with an organization like IS that moves at the speed of social media. The U.S.'s inefficient and highly bureaucratic internal processes often make it hard-pressed to even compete with a messaging campaign that moves at the speed of the Gutenberg Bible.

The Islamic State's Flawed Business Model

The Islamic State's faulty strategy has left the group with a long list of powerful enemies, which has in turn transformed the Islamic State's powerful communications capabilities from a luxury into a necessity. IS is now stuck in a multi-front war in Syria and Iraq, severely straining the group's resources and forcing it to lean more heavily on propaganda operations to galvanize its support base.

From the outset, IS generally rejected collaboration and compromise with like-minded militant organizations, and instead challenged these groups directly. When IS (then known as ISIL, or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) expanded from Iraq into Syria in the spring of 2013, it immediately began feuding with other Syrian rebel groups, including the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra. The two groups had very different approaches to relations with other rebels who opposed Bashar al-Assad's regime. As Charles Lister of the Brookings Institution has noted, "Jabhat al-Nusra shared power and governance," whereas IS "demanded complete control over society."[11] IS's inability to work cooperatively with other Syrian rebel groups quickly earned it a host of enemies who were ostensibly on IS's own side of the conflict. Indeed, the majority of IS's geographic gains in Syria have come at the expense of other rebels rather than Assad's regime.

Despite its difficulties in working with other groups, IS managed to assemble a relatively

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[9] See Gary W. Montgomery and Timothy S. McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening vol. 2: Iraqi Perspectives* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2009); Daveed Gartenstein-Ross & Sterling Jensen, "The Role of Iraqi Tribes after the Islamic State's Ascendance," unpublished manuscript, forthcoming 2015.
[10] See Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "ISIS Is Losing Its Greatest Weapon: Momentum," *The Atlantic*, January 6, 2015.
[11] Charles Lister, *Profiling the Islamic State* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2014), p. 13.

broad-based Sunni coalition for its dramatic military push into Iraq in June 2014. This offensive obviously caused IS to immediately become the number-one foe of a wide variety of actors, including the Iraqi state, its ally Iran, and Iraq's Iranian-backed Shia militias. Indeed, mere days after IS seized Mosul, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's most senior Shia cleric, called on Iraq's citizens to join the fight against IS.[12] Thousands of Iraqi Shias responded to Sistani's appeal.

Although IS already possessed a wide array of enemies, the jihadist group almost immediately betrayed its partners in early July by rounding up ex-Baathist leaders in Mosul who had aided IS's advance.[13] Rather than consolidating its forces and reinforcing its territorial holdings, IS's next move was to attack another group, this time Iraq's Kurds—who, at the time, were not fighting IS—and thus opening a new front to the group's north. But IS was not done making enemies. Its genocidal campaign against the Yazidi minority religious sect, coupled with the beheading of two American journalists, prompted the U.S. and a coalition of allied states to join the fight, mounting a campaign of air strikes against IS.

The flaws of IS's military strategy have become increasingly apparent. The group's military defeat in Kobani, a predominantly Kurdish city in northern Syria, was particularly damaging, resulting in the death of over 2,000 IS fighters and the destruction of hard-to-replace military vehicles and weaponry.[14] IS's defeat at Kobani was also a blow to its cultivated image as an indomitable military force. More recently, IS lost control of Tikrit, and has found its northern Iraq holdings under increasing pressure, although it has been able to launch a new offensive into Anbar province that, among other things, masks the group's overarching trajectory of mounting losses.

As IS has lost territory in Iraq and parts of Syria, it has found itself increasingly dependent on external support to buttress its capabilities, sustain its growth, and maintain its juggernaut image. IS relies on three primary sources of external support: foreign fighters from outside Syria and Iraq (though foreign fighter numbers, as previously noted, have been in decline), likeminded jihadist organizations outside of Iraq and Syria who may pledge allegiance to IS or otherwise provide it material assistance, and other rebel factions in Syria and Iraq who may bolster IS's local capabilities.

IS's propaganda machine is critical to the group's efforts to attract support from these sources. Propaganda is especially important in recruiting individuals and organizations who might never come into physical contact with Islamic State fighters, and who instead judge the group largely based on the image it has cultivated through social media and online strategic messaging, and on the mainstream media's reporting on IS's gains and overall health. Such individuals and organizations who are considering a relationship with IS may also judge IS based on what the group's emissaries tell them, although the veracity of the emissaries' messages will largely be judged by how well they track with perceived on-the-ground realities projected through these various media sources.

In other words, IS's strong propaganda apparatus has helped to keep the organization afloat

[12] Loveday Morris, "Shiite Cleric Sistani Backs Iraqi Government's Call for Volunteers to Fight Advancing Militants," *Washington Post*, June 13, 2014.
[13] Maggie Fick and Ahmed Rasheed, "ISIS Rounds Up Ex-Baathists to Eliminate Rivals," Reuters, July 8, 2014.
[14] Robin Wright, "A Victory in Kobani?", *The New Yorker*, January 27, 2015.

despite its flawed business model. This report now explores IS's messaging, as understanding it is critical to defanging the jihadist group's powerful narrative.

The Islamic State's Narrative

The Islamic State has a multifaceted narrative that appeals to its various target audiences in several ways, as depicted in the pyramid in Figure 1. The three messages at the bottom of the pyramid—religious obligation, political grievance, and sense of adventure—are some of the most difficult for IS's foes to counter. They are also the areas upon which a significant amount of counter-IS messaging has focused.

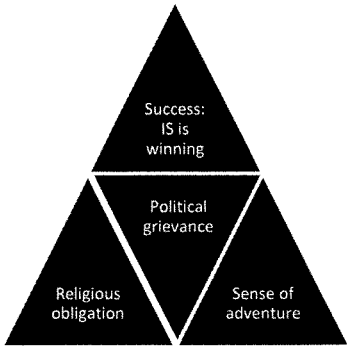

Figure 1: The Islamic State's Narrative

There are a large number of components to the religious aspect of IS's narrative, but the culmination of the various threads is that Muslims worldwide have a religious duty to support the caliphate. One duty allegedly upon them is to emigrate to the territory that IS holds. As the caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, said in an audio address released weeks after the caliphate's establishment: "Whoso is able to emigrate to the Islamic State, let him emigrate. For emigration to the Abode of Islam is obligatory."[15] Another alleged obligation is fighting jihad on IS's behalf. Foreign fighters in the theater have exhorted their countrymen—both through distributed statements and also peer-to-peer communications—to fulfill this religious obligation. In one release from March 2015, titled "Message from Those Who Are Excused to Those Who Are Not Excused," two deaf IS foreign fighters used sign language to call on Western Muslims to join the caliphate. The video's title refers to the fact that individuals with disabilities are generally exempt from waging jihad under Islamic law, and the use of these deaf men was designed to shame able-bodied men who have yet to migrate to the Islamic State. Another set of religious arguments calls on Muslims to carry out attacks in their home countries if they cannot migrate to Syria or Iraq.

A second component of the Islamic State's communications strategy emphasizes political grievances with the West. There are many different varieties of political grievance that the group can draw upon. IS, for example, has turned the U.S.-led air campaign against it into a propaganda opportunity, comparing the military operation to the Crusades of the Middle Ages. Indeed, the fourth issue of *Dabiq*, IS's English-language magazine, was titled "The Failed Crusade," and discussed the new Judeo-Christian Crusade against the Muslims.

Another component of IS's narrative appeals to jihadists' sense of adventure and

[15] Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, "Risāla ilā 'l-mujāhidīn wa'l-umma al-Islamiyya fī shahr Ramaān," *Mu'assasat al-Furqān*, July 1, 2014.

excitement. Foreign fighter recruitment videos blend narratives about religious obligation with themes depicting jihad as an action-packed adventure, replete with symbols of masculinity intended to attract young men. IS's cutting-edge special effects also help life on the battlefield to seem both exciting and "cool."

If any of these IS narratives were to be definitively refuted, it would have a significant impact on the organization. However, these narratives are particularly difficult to prove false because they are to a large extent subjective. For example, IS has offered a myriad of theological justifications for the atrocities it commits, and has extensively explained why IS is uniquely fulfilling Islamic obligations. IS's supporters are aware that the majority of Muslims, and most Islamic scholars, vehemently disagree: The fact that such a large body opposes their religious justifications is unpersuasive to most (though not all) of IS's supporters. This is not to say that arguments challenging IS's religious legitimacy are unimportant, but they likely serve as a bulwark against too much IS expansion, as well as a means of persuading the occasional IS supporter to step back from the ledge, rather than a dagger through IS's heart. Similarly, the battlefield may not be as glamorous as IS claims, but many of the group's supporters won't know one way or the other until they arrive.

But IS's claim that the group is defeating its opponents on the battlefield is not a simple matter of opinion: It is either objectively true or not. Thus, this is the aspect of IS's narrative that can be most effectively countered. It is also the aspect of IS's narrative that is most tightly wedded to IS as an organization. IS, as previously noted, should not be confused with the jihadist movement as a whole: It is one organization within the broader movement, an organization that is uniquely problematic due to its over-the-top brutality and other repugnant excesses, such as its institution of sexual slavery. While IS will be hurt if fewer people turn to jihadism, it will be more directly harmed if jihadists choose not to support it as an organization. And its narrative of victory is critical to persuading jihadists to support IS specifically, as opposed to—for example—regional jihadist groups. Indeed, IS's competition with al-Qaeda has been every bit as intense as its fight against regional governments.[16]

One important reason that IS's argument that it has immense momentum can be more easily countered than other aspects of its narrative is that IS has been steadily losing ground in Iraq, and has largely failed to take and hold new ground in the Iraq-Syria theater since October 2014. Thus, IS has begun to exaggerate its gains, both in the Iraq-Syria theater and internationally, and sought to obscure its losses. In other words, large parts of this argument are untrue, and IS's narrative of success can be undermined.

A recent Arabic-language article by IS supporter Shaykh Abu Sulayman al-Jahbadhi sheds light on IS's messaging strategy. Warning against the "showing of weakness," Jahbadhi implored residents of cities controlled by IS not to show the hardships that sieges against their cities impose on the population—such as lack of food, water, and gas. He warned that "such announcements are considered to be major shortcomings in maintaining the psychological war with the enemy." Jahbadhi went on to say that even displaying atrocities committed by IS's enemies against civilian populations, such as casualties inflicted by "Crusaders" bombing IS-held areas, should be avoided,

[16] See discussion of the contours of the competition between the two in Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Bridget Moreng, "Al-Qaeda Is Beating the Islamic State," *Politico*, April 4, 2015.

because the world would not sympathize with IS regardless. He explained:

> The caliphate showed the crimes of the coalition and the *rawafid* [rejectionists]; however, it has always featured the retaliatory attacks, that is, the slaughter of a spy or punishment of soldiers. This is intended to reflect the absence of weakness. The caliphate would never publicize the crimes of the enemy alone! This would never happen, for the world no longer sympathizes or empathizes with us. You show their crimes only when they are accompanied with the punishment. When the caliphate published the video of the burning of Moaz [al-Kassasbeh], it had previously released pictures of children burned in the shelling of the coalition warplanes. The caliphate shows their crimes and also shows how it is capable of retaliating for them.[17]

In other words, the projection of strength is IS's central message. It is acceptable to show the atrocities that the caliphate's enemies are committing, but only if such imagery is accompanied by a display of how IS retaliated—thus underscoring IS's fundamental power.

In addition to obscuring its losses, IS has systematically exaggerated its strength. Part of the reason it has done so is precisely to disguise those losses. The best example of IS's tendency to exaggerate and embellish is in Africa. In October 2014, a group of militants in the eastern Libyan city of Derna openly pledged *bayat* to IS, and declared that they had established an emirate in the city. Soon after the *bayat* pledge, IS flooded social media with videos and pictures of IS militants in Derna, including a video showing a parade of militants waving IS flags as they drove down a thoroughfare in the city.

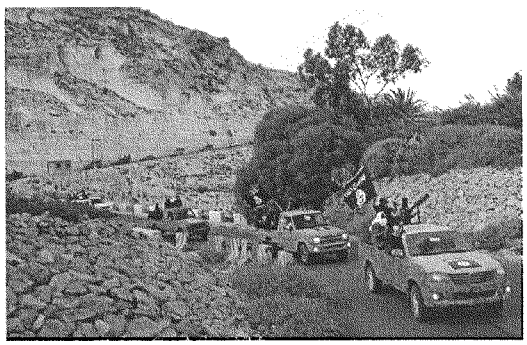

Figure 2: Photo of a convoy of IS militants near Derna

This show of force led many observers to conclude that the Islamic State held full control of Derna, and numerous media outlets then reported IS's control of Derna as an objective fact.[18] But in reality, control of Derna was, and remains, divided between a number of militant groups, including some al-Qaeda-linked groups that oppose IS's expansion into Libya.

After bluffing its way into convincing observers that it controlled Derna, IS issued a deceptive claim of responsibility for the devastating March 18 attack on the Bardo museum in

[17] Abu Sulayman al-Jahbadhi, "War Policy against the Enemy Does Not Allow Showing of Weaknesses," posted April 2, 2015.

[18] For examples of these reports, see Paul Cruickshank et al., "ISIS Comes to Libya," CNN, November 18, 2014; Maggie Michael, "How a Libyan City Joined the Islamic State Group," Associated Press, November 9, 2014.

Tunis. Though IS quickly claimed credit for that attack, Tunisia instead attributed it to the al-Qaeda-aligned Katibat Uqba ibn Nafi, and identified the group's emir Luqman Abu Saqr as the mastermind.[19] Even though IS's claim of responsibility was an exaggeration, it nonetheless furthered the perception that the group had significant momentum internationally, as it came amidst a series of IS advances in various countries, including Boko Haram's March 7 pledge of *bayat* to IS.

IS's rationale for exaggerating its role in the Bardo attack was clear. In the battle for market share of global jihadism, IS has al-Qaeda's media operations outgunned. The Bardo attack, because it was carried out by a rival, threatened IS's narrative of success at a time when IS was experiencing losses in Iraq but compensating by gaining ground in Africa. But IS knew from past experience that al-Qaeda generally doesn't claim credit for attacks while the operatives who carried them out are still at large: Thus, IS could issue a claim of responsibility before al-Qaeda was prepared to do so. Given the way media cycles work—and IS is *very* attuned to the media cycle—a false or exaggerated claim of responsibility would dominate the news before anybody could disprove it, at a time when Bardo remained a top headline. Al-Qaeda's greater role wouldn't become known until the attack was no longer a hot news item.

In addition to exaggerating its gains, IS has sought to downplay, or deflect attention from, its military defeats. Thus, as the group experienced losses in Iraq, it aggressively pushed to expand outside of that theater. IS's recent acquisitions of both Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis in Egypt and also Boko Haram have been helpful in shifting the media's attention from IS's losses in its stronghold to its growth on a new continent. IS's extreme brutality has also seemingly been employed to distract from the group's military defeats. Just days after IS pulled its forces back from Kobani, thus finally acknowledging its defeat there, IS released a video showing the immolation of Moaz al-Kassasbeh, a Jordanian fighter pilot whom IS had captured after his plane crashed in Syria. The media fixated not on IS's defeat in Kobani but instead Kassasbeh's brutal execution.

The media has often unwittingly aided IS's propaganda strategy by having a narrative about the jihadist group that mirrors its own, emphasizing IS's growth and its brutality. Indeed, in critical instances, the media has helped IS to portray itself as stronger than was the case by reporting its false or exaggerated claims—such as IS's supposed capture of Derna—as fact. Rather than refuting IS's false claims, the mainstream media has at critical times reported them as objective fact, thus *reinforcing* the audience's view that these exaggerations are true. (See the graphic depiction of this process in Figure 3.)

[19] See Patrick Markey, "Tunisia Signals Local al-Qaeda Links to Bardo Museum Attack," Reuters, March 26, 2015; Richard Spencer, "Tunisia Arrests 23 over Museum Attack," *Telegraph*, March 26, 2015.

One reason the media often repeats IS's claims uncritically, and reinforces its narrative, is that IS dominates the media environment in territories under its control, making it difficult for independent media outlets to obtain a clear picture of developments in IS-controlled territory.[20] Further, in Derna social media has low penetration relative to the Syria conflict, and it is also too dangerous for the vast majority of reporters to visit the city.[21] Thus, it isn't shocking that the media repeated IS's factual claims uncritically, especially when neither the U.S. government nor any other interested party took the time to refute them. The Islamic State has leveraged its manipulation of the media to present a narrative of military momentum and strength.

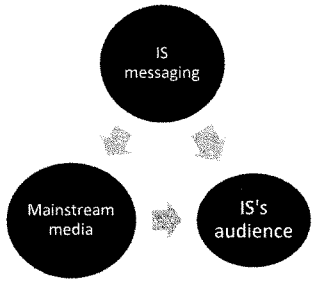

Figure 3: IS pushes its message, including exaggerated claims, to the media and its target audience. The media often repeats these exaggerations back to the target audience as fact.

How to Combat the Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy

The U.S. has thus far been unable to wrest control of the narrative from IS. The U.S. confronts a couple of major weaknesses in attempting to respond to IS's propaganda offensive. First, the operational tempo of the U.S. government's messaging campaign is too slow to keep up with IS's high-octane, rapid-fire social media apparatus. Second, even if the U.S. could keep up with IS's messaging campaign, it is seen as lacking credibility by key members of the target audience of people who are vulnerable to IS's recruitment tactics.

So what can the U.S. do? The Islamic State's messaging strategy is based on the idea that it has massive momentum, at a time when this momentum is running out. That presents a significant vulnerability for the organization, social media juggernaut or not, and the U.S. should work to shift the narrative surrounding IS from one of strength and victory to one of weakness and loss. This can be achieved by focusing attention on the group's military defeats, fact-checking the group's claims of victory, and revealing the group's many exaggerations. Further, this couter-narrative should expose IS's governance failures, and its struggles to function as a state. Just as puncturing IS's narrative of success can make it far less attractive, exposing its failings as a state can undermine the image of the caliphate as an Islamic utopia, dissuading foreigners from making the arduous trip to Syria and discouraging like-minded jihadist groups from pledging allegiance to a caliph whose caliphate is crumbling.

Several steps can be taken to improve the U.S.'s counter-IS messaging campaign:

- To address the problem of how government bureaucracies harm the U.S.'s ability to

[20] See Bryan Price et al., *The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State* (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, 2014), p. 56.
[21] A graphic illustration of the dangers can be found in "Army Official: Islamic State Kills 5 Journalists Working for Libyan TV Station," Reuters, April 27, 2015.

compete in a social media campaign, the government should have a small and nimble unit specifically charged with refuting IS's propaganda. This unit should include both strategic communications professionals with expertise in social media and also intelligence analysts who are capable of monitoring a) what messages IS is pushing out to advance its narrative of strength and victory, and b) in what ways IS's claims diverge from the ground truth.

- The U.S. government should not always be the face of the response to IS's claims. As Nicholas Rasmussen, the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, acknowledged, "the government is probably not the best platform to try to communicate with the set of actors who are potentially vulnerable to this kind of propaganda and this kind of recruitment."[22] Rather, one primary means of dissemination for this counter-IS unit should be pushing out its information—for example, in the form of fact sheets—to members of the mainstream media who can investigate the U.S.'s claims, and report them if they are persuaded following their own due diligence. This can break the cycle wherein IS's target audience receives the same, often exaggerated, factual claims from both IS and also the media. Further, while many jihadists are disdainful of the Western media, it is nonetheless perceived as a more neutral arbiter of fact in a way that the U.S. government is not. Sharing information with the media in this manner can have a snowball effect: IS critics and members of civil society may capitalize on press reports of IS's decline, thus amplifying the message.

- To further the objective of undercutting IS's narrative of victory, the counter-IS unit should have the ability to selectively declassify information for journalists that supports its claim that IS is losing momentum.

- Credibility is vital in any messaging campaign. One reason IS's message is vulnerable is because parts of it are not true, and thus IS risks more serious damage to perceptions of its trustworthiness. The counter-IS unit should strive to maintain its credibility in all instances, and should not push out false or questionable information even if its dissemination has the potential to harm IS.

Countering the Islamic State's narrative of invulnerability is not a silver bullet. IS possesses the resources to threaten Iraq and Syria for the foreseeable future, and especially in the Syrian city of Raqqa it may have longevity. But by showing areas where IS is enfeebled and declining rather than strong and vibrant, the U.S. government can diminish the group's ability to recruit new fighters and affiliates.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions.

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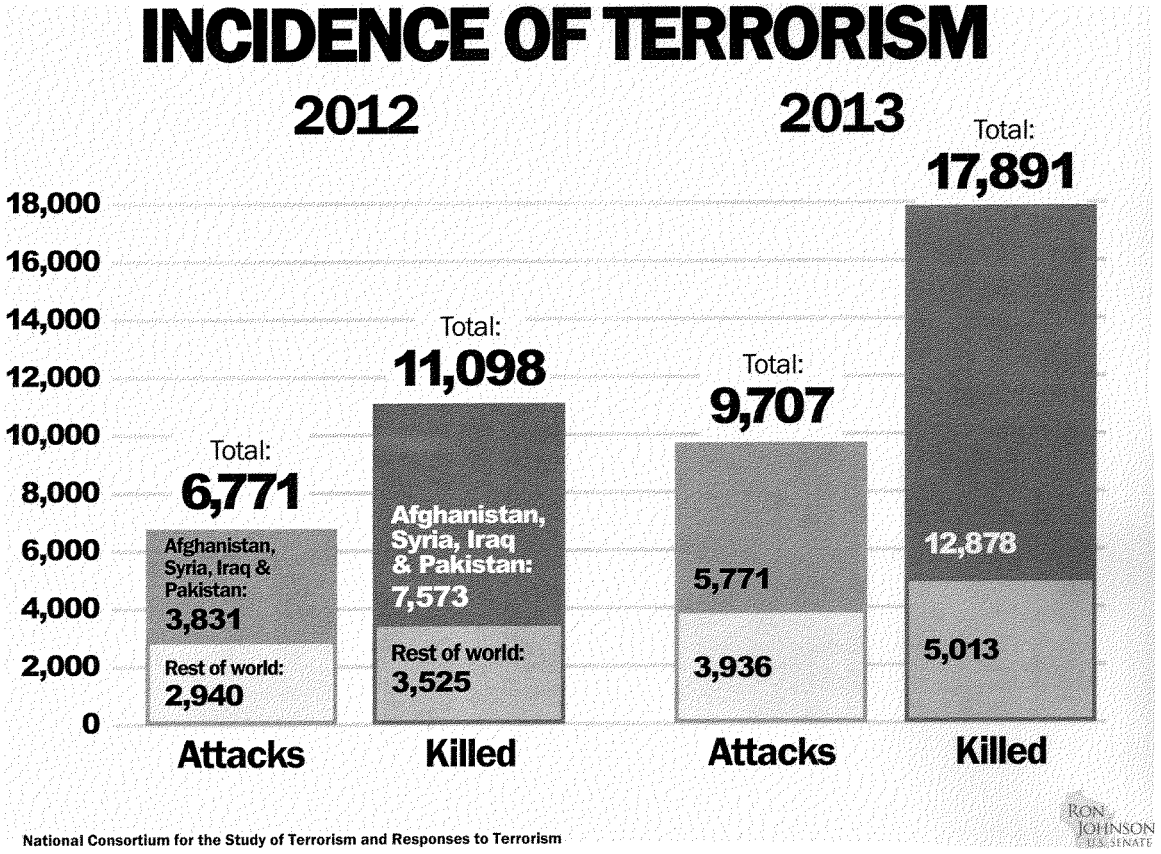
[22] Nicholas Rasmussen, "U.S. Intensifies Effort to Blunt ISIS' Message," *New York Times*, February 16, 2015.


INCIDENCE OF TERRORISM
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2013
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16,000
14,000
12,000
10,000
8,000
6,000
4,000
2,000
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Total:
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Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq & Pakistan:
3,831
Rest of world:
2,940
Attacks
Total:
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Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq & Pakistan:
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Rest of world:
3,525
Killed
Total:
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Attacks
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Killed
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URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2fAofF39Eg

"ISIS Releases Recruitment Video of Militants Giving Candy to Children"

VICE NEWS ISIS Has a Really Slick and Sophisticated Media Department

ISIS

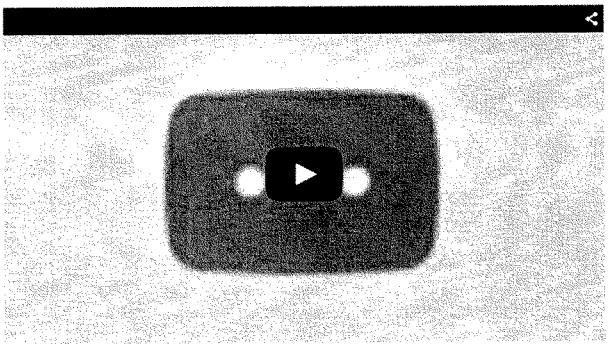
ISIS Has a Really Slick and Sophisticated Media Department

By Olivia Becker

July 12, 2014 | 12:35 pm

In addition to being one of the most brutal militant groups currently fighting in the Middle East, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) might also have the most elaborate public relations strategy.

This week, the insurgents released a new episode in a video series called Mujatweets, depicting an ISIS member visiting injured fighters in a hospital and offering them comforting and encouraging words.





ISIS Releases Recruitment Video of Militants Giving Candy to Children

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Post-Hearing Responses Submitted by Daveed Gartenstein-Ross
to Questions for the Record from Senator Claire McCaskill

"Jihad 2.0: Social Media in the Next Evolution of Terrorist Recruitment"

1. Are you aware to the extent in which the State Department, the Department of Defense, or other agencies involved in the social media counterterrorism campaign have developed metrics for success?

Though it is known that government agencies involved in counter-messaging efforts have established metrics to measure the effectiveness of their operations, these metrics are not publicly stated, and are likely classified. This raises the possibility that some of the metrics that analysts and journalists employ to evaluate and critique counter-messaging operations differ from the internal performance metrics that CSCC and other agencies have established.

2. Are you aware of any strategic discussions or decisions by the federal government about changing spending priorities among different communications media?

There is a widespread view that there exists what you might call a resource-to-perception mismatch on the counter-messaging front. The State Department's CSCC is considered the tip of the spear of the U.S.'s counter-messaging campaign by many observers (though this view is by no means universally shared, especially by other agencies), but the resources allocated to CSCC—an annual budget of $5-6 million since its inception in 2011, and a staff of about 50 employees—pale in comparison to the resources that the Pentagon, CIA, and other government agencies receive for counter-messaging.

As such, there is discussion within the government about what agency should have the lead in counter-messaging, and whether funding levels should be adjusted. One argument is that CSCC, as the perceived lead organization, should receive additional resources commensurate with its lead role in counter-messaging. The contrary view is that a different organization within the government should be seen as the lead agency, a view bolstered by the fact that all products that come out of CSCC are explicitly branded with the State Department's imprimatur. I don't have a horse in this race, but would only point out that byzantine bureaucracies and confusion about who has what responsibility or hierarchical role can interfere with strategy, including in counter-messaging.

3. In your observation, what are the reasons that the State Department and the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications is failing to effectively get our message out via social media in a substantive way? What areas do you view as needing the most important and what steps would you take to see that happen?

Before commenting on CSCC's current approach, it is worth noting that CSCC is an evolving organization that is seeking to adapt its counter-messaging strategy to meet current challenges. In February 2015, Rashad Hussain was appointed the new head of CSCC and in recent months, policymakers have expressed their satisfaction with the strategy that the new leadership has

articulated. It is too early to comment on whether the articulation of this strategy will be matched by an approach that is in fact more productive.

One major challenge for CSCC and other government agencies has been countering the phenomenon I discussed in my testimony: the perception of military strength and momentum that ISIL has carefully cultivated through its robust propaganda machine, often through false or exaggerated claims. It is obviously more difficult to counter this image of strength when ISIL has made recent advances—including in Ramadi, Baiji and the Syrian city of Tadmur—but even these obviously significant ISIL gains have often been explained hyperbolically in media coverage. Overall, ISIL has relied heavily on a "winner's message" to attract support, a message that emphasizes ISIL's ability to take and hold territory and its continued global expansion into new theatres such as North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. CSCC and other government agencies have struggled to combat ISIL's narrative of strength even when it has been based on fraudulent or concocted "facts," such as the claim that ISIL was in complete control of the Libyan city of Derna—something that has never been the case.

In my written testimony, I outlined steps that U.S. government agencies, including CSCC, can take to cut into this core message of ISIL's. I argue first that agencies tasked with counter-messaging should push out information about ISIL's battlefield losses and expose the group's efforts at deception to members of the mainstream media who can investigate the U.S.'s claims and report them if they are persuaded following their own due diligence. Second, I argue that counter-messaging agencies should have the ability to selectively declassify information for journalists that can undercut ISIL's message.

As to the reasons that CSCC's message has been suboptimal, I would pursue the following questions:

1. Does CSCC have a strong granular understanding of ISIL's messaging: In other words, does it understand, day to day and week to week, what major themes ISIL is pushing to expand its brand? Does it understand when these themes do not reflect the realities on the ground that ISIL is describing? If not, why not?
2. How broad are CSCC's connections with members of the mainstream media? Is it cultivating the right relationships with journalists, such that it provides the U.S. government with a voice that is contrary to ISIL's?
3. Does CSCC have the ability to selectively declassify information that can be damaging to ISIL when doing so would not damage U.S. national security interests? If not, what steps can be taken to selectively declassify relevant information?
4. Does CSCC have the right capabilities to produce videos, memes, and other material that is as slick as that produced by ISIL? If not, should its procurement processes be revised to allow it to more effectively contract for these services? The United States has strong capabilities in its private sector in this regard, but are they being harnessed by the U.S. government?

4. Do you know if the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications uses contractors in their social media engagement, and, if so, how they measure the success of those contracts?

The State Department does hire contractors to coordinate social media operations related to its counterterrorism mission, though the metrics for success are not publicly stated. One contractor that State has engaged is JTG Inc., a security firm based in Northern Virginia, which was awarded a $575,000 contract in June 2014 to expand the State Department's English-language counter-terrorism messaging operations, but there is no public information relating to the metrics used to measure this contractor's performance. U.S. government officials would be better positioned to provide detailed answers to this question.

5. To your knowledge, how much, if at all, does the federal government provide training opportunities and messages to local community organizations to assist in the online counterterrorism effort?

A U.S. government official would be better positioned to answer this question.

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