

## The Islamic State Threat to Western Homeland Security

Anthony NC\*

Department of Security Studies, Angelo State University, Texas, USA

\*Corresponding author: Anthony NC, Professor, Department of Security Studies, Angelo State University, Texas, USA, Tel: 325-486-6682; E-mail: anthony.celso@angelo.edu

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*"Likewise we renew our call to the muwahhidin in Europe and the disbelieving West and elsewhere, to target the crusaders in their own lands and wherever they are found. We will argue before Allah against any Muslim who has the ability to shed a single drop of crusader blood but does not do so, whether with an explosive device, a bullet, a knife, a car, a rock, or even a boot or a fist."*<sup>1</sup> Late IS Spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani".

### Introduction

The terrorism the West faces today is unprecedented. A 2016 U.S. congressional study reports that since 2014 there have been 101 Islamic State (IS) linked plots launched against the Western countries<sup>2</sup>. More troubling are IS' attacks that have killed more than 273 in Europe<sup>3</sup>. The terrorist threat is estimated as severe too critical in France, Belgium, Britain, the United States and Germany. These countries have experienced the most attacks and plots. Though 1,600 terror suspects have been arrested across Europe Islamic State's sympathizers continue their attacks<sup>4</sup>. Some analysts worry that IS' terror campaign could intensify as the organizations proto-jihadist state in Iraq-Syria unravels<sup>5</sup>. Even as its caliphate degrades IS sympathizers in 2017 attacked Stockholm, London, Manchester and Paris.

IS employs multiple methods to compromise North America and European security. Some assaults involve overseas trained and financed attack teams like those that killed 130 people in Paris on November 13, 2015. Employing firearms and explosive devices these attacks have been the most lethal in IS's terror campaign. Having foiled over a dozen IS linked terror plots since 2013 British security services were unable to prevent Khalid Masoud March 2017 vehicular and stabbing rampage that left five people dead outside Westminster's parliament building. Some two months later IS "soldier" Salman Abedi in May 2017 ignited an explosive filled backpack killing 22 people at the Manchester Arena concert. Many of the dead and wounded were children.

The number of supporters inspired by Islamic State propaganda to kill Westerners is alarming. Some of these lone wolf attacks have produced mass casualties. Encouraged by IS' pleas to attack the West two homegrown terrorists killed 13 people in San Bernardino, California in December 2015 and one IS affiliated extremist killed in 49 persons at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida a year later. Though these assaults used conventional firearms, other IS inspired attacks have used knives, axes, suicide explosive vests and most

prominently trucks. Driving a 19 ton cargo truck into a crowd celebrating Bastille Day in Nice one sympathizer killed 86 people in July 2016 while another of IS acolyte drove a truck into a Berlin Christmas market in December of 2016 killing 12 persons. Tunisian jihadist Anis Amri posted a video on line pledging his loyalty to IS after the Berlin attack<sup>6</sup>.

What the caliphate has not achieved through trained assassins and ideological exhortation it has virtually directed operations by guiding sympathizers to kill Westerners. This remote control terrorism features virtual planners who communicate with the caliphate's supporters through encrypted technology. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross indicates that English and French speaking jihadists are prominent in IS virtual planning network<sup>7</sup>. Working for IS French jihadist Rachid Kassim in June 2016 directed one extremist that decapitated a police captain and his companion in a town near Paris and two others that beheaded an elderly priest in rural village the following month. Both acts were accompanied by IS fidelity pledges by the attackers before their deaths in police shootouts.

French police disrupted a Kassim directed plot featuring teen girls who wanted to attack a train station by igniting improvised explosive devices. Underlying his significance Kassim was killed in a coalition airstrike targeting IS' virtual operations network. Virtually directed and inspired attacks have been executed in the United States. Prior to their killing in an American air strikes English speaking militants Junaid Hussein and Abu Issa al-Amriki were implicated in plots to direct sympathizers in America, Britain and Australia. Hussein, for example, encouraged two American jihadists to attack an event featuring Muhammad cartoons at the Curtis Cutwell Center in Garland, Texas in May 2015. Though police killed the attackers the Garland Plot was IS first serious effort to convince its supporters to kill Americans on their own homeland.

IS publicizes its attacks in its English, French, Turkish and Russian e-magazines congratulating its martyrs for their killings of Western apostates. The English based Dabiq and French language Dar al-Islam

<sup>1</sup> Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, "Say, Die in Your Rage" accessed at: <https://archive.org/details/SayDieInYourRage> 4.

<sup>2</sup> "Terror Gone Viral Overview of the 100+ ISIS-Linked Plots Against the West" House Homeland Security Committee Majority Staff Report 2014-2016 July 2016 accessed at: [https://homeland.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Report\\_Terror-Gone-Viral.pdf](https://homeland.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Report_Terror-Gone-Viral.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen, Emilie, "Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect", Perspectives on Terrorism 10:6 3-21.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, "The Future of Jihadism in Europe: A Pessimistic View" Perspectives on Terrorism 10: 156-170.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Georg Heil, "The Berlin Attack and the 'Abu Wala' Islamic State Recruitment Network" CTC Sentinel 10: 1-11.

<sup>7</sup> Daveed Gartenstein Ross, "Radicalization in the U.S. and the Rise of Terrorism" Congressional Testimony: Foundation for the Defense of Democracies September 14, 2016 accessed at: <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Gartenstein-Ross-Statement-Radicalization-9-14.pdf>.

featured Paris attack ringleader Abdelhamid Abaaoud and Brussels attackers Khalid and Brahim el-Bakraoui presenting them as model soldiers whose actions should be emulated. IS' Amaq News Agency dramatizes these attacks as foreshadowing IS' impending victory over the West.

The origins of IS related violence in the West are not contested. Analysts argue that Syria's civil war and the Islamic State's plebian jihadism spread to supporters across a virtual network are the principal culprits<sup>8</sup> [1]. With its underlying sectarian antagonisms Syria's civil war that pits Sunni rebels against an Alawi dominated regime has attracted many Western jihadists to the Islamic State's extremist ideology. Some 5,000 Westerners have traveled to Syria to support the jihadi cause.

Many of these jihadists were committed extremists before they traveled to fight the Assad regime. The civil war's carnage has only intensified their religious fanaticism that has swelled the Islamic State's ranks. Without the estimated thirty thousand foreign fighters who traveled to the Mideast it is unlikely that the Islamic State could seize terrain in western Iraq and eastern Syria to declare its caliphate. The caliphate declaration and IS end times ruminations of a final prophetic battle against evil have galvanized many young jihadists.

Described as plebian jihadism the Islamic State's ideology synthesizes apocalyptic, takfirist, and Wahhabi influences. This ideological configuration has attracted tens of thousands of extremists. Many live in the West and have little knowledge of mainstream Islamic practices. The caliphate's social media network relays its world view simply to its acolytes venerating brutality and violence. The caliphate's hip hop stylish videos are perfectly suited to entertainment genres familiar to young people. Alienated by Western culture and anxiously seeking an alternative communal identity some European and North American Muslims identify with IS's cause. The San Bernardino and Orlando attackers pledged support for IS' Emir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi during their attacks.

One way to envision IS' threat is to compare it to Al Qaeda's (AQ) now degraded attack network. Since its 9-11 attacks in the U.S. and its 2005 London subway and bus assaults AQ's external operations branch has withered. With its key leaders killed in drone strikes or Special Forces raids in Pakistan and Afghanistan AQ's offensive capabilities have declined forcing it to rely on its Yemeni affiliate to launch attacks against the West.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was in the forefront of directing the organization far enemy strategy of attacking the United States. AQAP ideologue American born Anwar al-Awlaki and his English language magazine Inspire encouraged supporters to attack the West. Awlaki's on-line discussions with Captain Nidal Hassan convinced him in 2009 to kill 13 fellow service members at the Fort Hood Texas military base. He also helped train Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab to ignite an explosive device on a Detroit bound passenger jet in December 2009 that failed because of a faulty design. Though killed in a 2011 Anwar al-Awlaki's on-line writings continue to inflame jihadi extremists.

Since 2009 AQAP's external branch has also been degraded by intelligence and kinetic operations. The organization has not mounted a serious operation to attack the U.S. homeland since 2012 and its principal success has been through ideological inspiration. Compared to IS' assault against the West AQAP's far enemy strategy has yielded

meagre results. It has been linked to the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing that killed three people and it had a nebulous connection to the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris that killed 13 people. Significantly Said and Cherif Kouachi had to borrow funds from an IS terrorist to mount the Charlie Hebdo attack casting doubt on their AQAP connection.

Awlaki's writings prominence among young English speaking jihadists convinced IS to adopt him. Increasingly Western jihadists have cross hybridized jihadist sympathies often gravitating toward the most powerful group. San Bernardino terrorist Syed Rizwan Farook and Orlando killer Omar Marteen switched their allegiance from AQAP to IS when Baghdadi's group achieved greater prominence.

Their adoption of IS' world view is hardly surprising. The Islamic State's radical ideological discourse, its hip hop video style propaganda and its exaltation of brutality speaks to the predominately young male Western jihadist populations. Al Qaeda's reliance on geriatric ideologues counseling moderation and consensus has not served it well in reaching out to young jihadists eager to wage merciless warfare. Ironically IS has been more successful at implementing Al Qaeda's strategy to attack Western homeland and realized its grand ambition to form a Mideast jihadi emirate.

This essay examines IS directed, virtual and inspired operations to kill Westerners. It contains three key sections. First, it examines the caliphate's media and external terror operations. Abu Muhammad al-Adnani's role and the caliphate's Amniyat security apparatus are discussed. Second, it conceptualizes IS directed, virtual and inspired operations and why they have proven so effective. Some of these inspired operations involve lone wolf terrorists with multiple jihadist allegiances. Third, it assesses at the future of IS terrorism in its post-caliphate stage.

Mosul's impending conquest and the likely destruction of IS' administrative capital of Raqqa, Syria eradicates the organization's state building project. Faced with the dismantling of its Iraqi-Syrian caliphate IS is likely to morph into a terror-insurgent movement ever reliant on inspiring and directing virtual attacks. The role of the dark net and encrypted technology like Telegram, WhatsApp and Surespot is a guarantor that IS' virtual network may survive the caliphate's destruction.

## I: IS Propaganda against the West and its External Operations Network

No discussion of IS' 2014-2017 attacks in the West can proceed without addressing Abu Muhammad al-Adnani's role. Prior to his August 2016 killing in an American airstrike Adnani directed IS terrorism against the West. He was a brilliant polemicist capable of rallying supporters to kill Westerners. Starting in September 2014 his calls for attacks by any means possible were heeded by sympathizers in America, France, Belgium, Australia, Canada, Denmark and Australia. Not simply confined to a propaganda role Adnani participated in the development of IS's external operations. He reportedly authorized the assault team that carried out the November 13, 2015 attacks in Paris. His legacy is profound and deadly.

Born in Syria Adnani was imprisoned by the Assad regime for his jihadist activities. He was one of the early members of Al Qaeda in Iraq

<sup>8</sup> Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen, "Plebian Jihadism in Denmark: An Individualization and Popularization Predating the Growth of the Islamic State" Perspectives on Terrorism 10: 102-108.

(AQI) joining the organization soon after the 2003 US invasion. He swore fidelity [bay'ah] to AQI's emir Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Binali informs us that Adnani played a critical role in the guidance of AQI's training camps. After being imprisoned by US authorities at Camp Bucca, Adnani was released by Iraqi officials after the US departure. His service to AQI led to senior positions in its Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) successor that in 2006 prematurely declared an emirate. Adnani swore loyalty to Zarqawi's successors including Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi who in 2010 assumed leadership of the network. ISI's revitalized network capitalized on the power vacuum left by the US departure and the sectarian antagonisms percolating in the region<sup>9</sup>.

Adnani emerged as ISI's second in command and he played a pivotal role in the formation of its Syrian network. He along with Abu Muhammad al-Golani assisted in the creation of Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) that eventually broke away from IS and later Al Qaeda (AQ) to form Jabhat Fatah al-Sham [Levant Conquest Front]<sup>10</sup>. His importance as a propagandist is incontrovertible for his prolific audio addresses pillory IS' many opponents that include "Zionist-Crusaders", Kurdish "apostates", the Shia, Alawites and Al Qaeda. He presents a didactic universe where IS aligned Sunnis confront a despotic world in which their struggle is divinely ordained to triumph. Significantly it is Adnani that declares the formation of the caliphate in June of 2014.

Adnani's audio addresses propound key IS themes that the Muslim world is in a state of discord [fitna] and ignorance [jahiliyyah] that can only be overcome through fortification of medieval Islamic values. This crisis he contends is exacerbated by a Zionist-Crusader alliance with Iran that aims to annihilate righteous Sunnis who will join with IS in a final prophetic apocalyptic war. He depicts IS aligned Sunnis as facing a vast diabolical conspiracy.

His voice was a rallying cry for action that attracting vast numbers of foreign fighters. Europeans play a pivotal role in IS external operations to attack the West. French and Belgian born fighters, for example, were in the vanguard of IS's assault in Europe. The caliphate's hatred of the West is driven by ideological and situational forces. First, the caliphate's apocalyptic ideology mandates confrontation with the demonic West. Second, it needs to retaliate against the Western assisted military campaign against the caliphate. Third, it directly appeals to European and North American Muslims that religious imperatives demand they side with the Caliphate by joining IS military forces or killing Westerners in their own lands.

Adnani's call for terrorism against the West is expressed in speeches and publications. His four major addresses between September 2014 and May 2016 published across Al Hayat Media Enterprises call for Muslims to launch attacks against Westerners. Complementing his oratorical skills was his position within the Islamic States media and terror operations. Adnani oversaw production values and content for IS' execution videos of enemy soldiers, homosexuals, western hostages,

sorcerers, adulterers and Christians. The theatrical punishments (burials, drownings, immolations, beheadings, fire squad, casting people off of tall buildings) graphically shown were designed to inspire fear and generate support from young jihadists attracted to IS' video game violence.

Featured in many videos are European rap artists whose hip hop messages are designed to recruit Western fighters. In his profile of thirty thousand Syrian foreign fighters Richard Barrett documents that vast majority of these fighters are young males who dominate in the ranks of the Islamic State soldiers<sup>11</sup>. Among the five thousand European fighters French, Belgian and British nationals are prominently displayed in IS' videos including the late British executioner Mohammad Emwazi nicknamed Jihadi John and Abdelhamid Abaaoud the organizer of the November 2015 Paris attacks who would later die in a police raid<sup>12</sup>.

Adnani, moreover, supervised IS external terror operations across the world. Based on testimony by a German IS defector Adnani screened European candidates trained in the caliphate's camps<sup>13</sup>. French and Belgian fighters were especially enthusiastic about committing attacks against their home countries. The Brussels suburb of Molenbeek has been a den for IS recruitment and terror planning.

Beyond directing teams to kill Westerners, Adnani hoped to inspire lone wolf and homegrown terrorists. Adani's incendiary style can be seen in the passage below that eerily foreshadows attacks by IS sympathizers. His September 2014 address urges IS follower to:

*"If you kill a disbelieving American or European-especially the spiteful and filthy French-or an Australian, or a Canadian, or any other disbelievers from the disbelievers waging war, including the citizens of the countries they entered into a coalition against the Islamic State, then rely on Allah, and kill him in any manner or way however it may be. Smash his head with a rock, or slaughter him with a knife, or run over him with your car<sup>14</sup>."*

Since Adnani's call over two dozen plots or attacks have been committed in the West by Islamic State sympathizers. Heeding his entreaty Europeans and North Americans have been stabbed, bombed, axed, shot, beheaded, and in the most lethal lone wolf attack a IS sympathizer in Nice ran over 86 Bastille Day spectators with a tanker truck. Significantly the vast majority of those killed or wounded have been civilians. Trains, parade grounds, concerts, restaurants, shops, night clubs have been attacked. Many of the attackers swore fidelity to IS before they committed their atrocities.

The Islamic State's urging of violence against the West has a powerful effect on radicalizing young Muslims. A 2017 study reports 34 plots in 7 Western countries involved teenagers and preteens who executed or contemplated knife or explosives attacks. Some 50% of these young people had contact with IS operatives across social media

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Pollack (2013), "The Fall and Rise and Fall of Iraq" July 30, 2013 access at <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2013/07/30-fall-rise-fall-iraq-pollack.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Abu Turki bin Mubarek al-Binali, *ibid*

<sup>11</sup> Richard Barrett, "Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq The Soufan Group December 2015 accessed at [http://www.soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG\\_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf](http://www.soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Levitt, "The Islamic State's Lone Wolf Era is Over" March 24, 2016 accessed at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-islamic-sttaes-lone-wolf-era-is-over>

<sup>13</sup> Florian Flade, "The Islamic State Threat to Germany: Evidence from the Investigations" CTC Sentinel 9: 11-14; Sayed Huzaifah Alkaff and Muhammad Haziq Bin Jani, "The Death of IS Top Strategist: Reflections on Counter-Terrorism Efforts" Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis 8: 4-9.

<sup>14</sup> Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, "Indeed Your Lord is Ever Watchful" *ibid*, 11.

forums. One plot involved a twelve year old boy who failed to ignite an explosive device at a Christmas market in Germany. Had it not been for a badly designed improvised bomb the casualties could of have been considerable. The scale of the terror danger underscores the existence of vast network that has a great deal of autonomy to plan, execute, finance, inspire and virtually direct terror attacks.

### The caliphate's external operations branch

While Adnani oversaw external terror operations the detailed organization, financing and planning of IS terror campaign was performed by IS Amniyat internal security branch. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross argues that Amn al-Kharaj organized the caliphate's external operations<sup>15</sup>. The Amniyat has a hierarchical chain of command. Overall regional operations are overseen by militants born or familiar with the counties that are planning to attack. Though centralized IS's bureaucracy is sufficiently nimble giving freedom to its regional planners.

The caliphate's European theatre of operations is dominated by French born or speaking militants with Abu Sulayman al-Faransi and Salim Benghalem selecting, training, and dispatching attack teams. IS's terror campaign involves many French and Belgium operatives eager to attack their native homelands. Seven of the nine terrorists that hit Paris on November 13, 2015 were French.

Faransi and Benghalem worked with French ideologue Fabien Clain and Belgian team organizer Abdelhamid Abaaoud in selecting fighters<sup>16</sup>. Though some plots were disrupted; others succeeded spectacularly. The instruction these teams received increased the lethality of IS' terror campaign with the Paris 2015 and 2016 Brussels attacks killing 160 people.

French and Belgian direction of these operations is unsurprising for jihadi activism is deeply rooted in these countries. Some observers argue that the current wave of jihadi terrorism in France is attributable to Paris' Nineteenth District Network<sup>17</sup> [2]. The group's organizer Boukaker al-Hakim sent dozens of fighters to Iraq to wage jihad against the American after their overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime. Iraqi combat veterans like Mohammad al-Ayouni and Salim Benghalem are implicated in the current wave of jihadi violence in France and Belgium.

Jean Pierre Filiu argues that Hakim set up a IS' network in Tunisia that acts synergistically with terror cells in France<sup>18</sup>. He links the Tunis' Bardo Museum attack and the Suisse beach resort assault to low level attacks in France. IS' Belgian network has played a considerable role in the development of IS European terror operations.

Belgium has the highest per capita number of foreign fighters traveling to Syria of any Western European country. Of the 451 estimated fighters a majority are second and third generation immigrants who were raised in isolated impoverished neighborhoods<sup>19</sup>. Many are in their twenties and have criminal backgrounds. Alienated by Western culture and embittered by their criminal past these young people were looking for an alternative communal identity in their quest for redemption. Subsections of Belgium's immigrant population have proven vulnerable to jihadist radicalization.

There are many extremist organizations in Belgium. Researchers attribute the foreign fighter flow to Syria to three networks. Shariah4Belgium, Resto Tawid and the Zerkani Network, for example, recruited over 170 Belgian fighters some of whom have served in IS' external operations branch<sup>20</sup>. They include Abdelhamid Abaaoud who oversaw the Paris November 13, 2015 attacks. The Zerkani Network has been the focus of repeated anti-terror operations and prosecutions.

Based in Molenbeek Moroccan preacher Khalid Zerkani's Network is committed to the promotion of Islamist and jihadi causes<sup>21</sup>. Unemployment and criminal activity in this immigrant dominated suburb has been a conduit for extremist indoctrination of religiously illiterate young men. Often financed by clandestine activity the network generated funds to send fighters to Syria. Zerkani's network has been implicated with Paris attackers Abdelhamid Abaaoudd and Chakib Akrouh and Brussels terrorist Najim Laachraoui.

The Zerkani Network is part of Europe's infrastructure of jihadi entrepreneurs involved in the religious training of impressionable young men with violent criminal pasts. Led by charismatic preachers like Britain's Ahmed Choudary, France's Fabien Cain and Germany's Abu Wala these organizations have groomed hundreds of European jihadists Choudary's significance is profound for Sharia4Belgium is an offshoot of his organizational blueprint to spread jihadi activism across Europe<sup>22</sup>.

The Paris attackers stored weapons caches and explosives at multiple locations. Contributing to the success of its Paris assault was Belgium's underfinanced, understaffed and fragmented police and intelligence agencies. Strewn across federal, provincial and local levels often speaking different languages police and intelligence units guarded their autonomy religiously impairing the flow and coordination of information on terror suspects<sup>23</sup>.

Poor relations between Belgian police and immigrant communities, moreover, impeded the development of informants. The sheer size of Belgium's extremist community and its foreign fighters has overwhelmed security services. Poorly integrated into European wider

<sup>15</sup> Daveed Gartenstien-Ross and Nathaniel Barr,[Hot Issue] "Recent Attacks Illuminate the Islamic State's Europe Attack Network" Jamestown Foundation April 27, 2016 accessed at <http://jamestown.org/program/hot-issue-recent-attacks-illuminate-the-islamic-states-attack-network-in-europe>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Pierre Filiu, "The 'French Iraqi' Networks of the 2000s: Matrix of the 2015 Terrorist Attacks? Perspectives on Terrorism 10: 97-101.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Charles Brisard and Kevin Jackson, "The Islamic State's External Operations and the French-Belgian Networks" CTC Sentinel 9: 8-15.

<sup>20</sup> Pieter Van Ostaeyen, "The Belgian Radical Networks and the Road to the Brussels Attacks" CTC Sentinel 9:6 7-12.

<sup>21</sup> Guy Van Vierden [Hot Issue] "The Zerkani Network: Belgium's Most Dangerous Group" The Jamestown Foundation April 12, 2016 accessed at: <https://jamestown.org/program/hot-issue-the-zerkani-network-belgiums-most-dangerous-jihadist-group/>.

<sup>22</sup> Pieter Van Ostaeyen, *ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew Levitt, *Ibid*.

intelligence network Belgian communication with French intelligence agencies was poor. These conditions facilitated the development of IS terror cells.

## II. Conceptualizing IS Operations

The Islamic State’s European attack network presents severe challenges to security agencies. Though these assault types overlap the

caliphate has launched or been linked to directed, virtual, inspired and inspired lone wolf attacks. Each attack style has strengths and weaknesses and their lethality varies unpredictably. The illustration on the next page provides a typology and examples. I will discuss the attack typology sequentially beginning with directed operations and ending with IS affiliated lone wolf terrorism (Table 1).

Directed Attacks by IS agents trained and dispatched from Syria	Virtual Directed Attacks by IS Operatives who guide the caliphate’s supporters through social media channels	Ideologically Inspired Attacks by IS Supporters	“Lone Wolf” Attacks by Islamic Extremists with multiple jihadist sympathies
May 2014 Jewish Museum Attack in Brussels Aborted August 2015 Thalys Train Attack November 2015 Paris Attacks March 2016 Brussels Attacks	Aborted May 2015 Garland, Texas Attack July 2016 Wurzburg Germany Train Attack July 2016 Ansbach Germany Concert attacks on Outside Music Concert Attack July 2016 Saint-Etienne Du-Rouvray Church Attack	July 2016 Nice Bastille Day Attack December 2016 Berlin Christmas Market Attack	December 2015 San Bernardino attack June 2016 Orlando Pulse Nightclub Attack

**Table 1:** Types and examples of Islamic State attacks in the West.

### Directed attacks by trained IS operatives

This type of attack allows IS maximum control. The caliphate trains, finances and dispatched assault teams and guides their targeting. The Paris and Brussels attacks are exemplars of IS directed operations. The terrorists involved were trained in Syria and were dispatched to sow chaos in Europe transiting through Balkan refugee migrant routes with forged passports. IS’ European terror network, however, did not mature until January 2015 when Belgian authorities disrupted an 11 man attack cell in the town of Verviers. IS’ external security branch, moreover, accorded its tactical commander Abdelhamid Abaaoud freedom to develop its European operations<sup>24</sup>.

Recruited by the Zerkani network Abaaoud traveled to Syria in 2014 and eventually joined IS’ contingent of Belgian and French fighters. He was selected by Amniyat’s core trainer a Belgian national named “Abu Ahmad” (Osama Atar) to be IS point man for its European operations<sup>25</sup>. Abaaoud is connected to virtually every plot and attack that occurs in Europe from the May 2014 Jewish Museum attack to the March 2016 Brussels bombings. His associates include Mehdi Nemmouche (the Jewish Museum attack), Ayoub el Khazzani (the aborted Thalys train attack), the Verviers attack cell, Reda Hame (apprehended by French police in August 2015 before he could commit a terror attack), Sid Ahmed Ghlam, (arrested by French police in April 2015 for planning to carry out an act of terrorism) and Salah Abdelslam (connected to the Paris and Brussels attack cells)<sup>26</sup>.

IS began developing its European terror architecture before its caliphate proclamation. Abaaoud communicated with Mehdi Nemmouche who guarded Western prisoners in Syria. Nemmouche was notorious for his sadistic temperament and like many IS Belgian

fighters spent time in Molenbeek. After a trip to Southeast Asia Nemmouche returned to Belgium and after communications with Abaaoud gunned down four people at the Jewish Museum. He was later apprehended by French police after he crossed the Belgian border in a passenger train.

The Jewish Museum attack began IS’ terror campaign in Europe. By January 2015 it became clear that the caliphate was beginning to move beyond lone gunmen when Belgian police intercepted phone calls between the Verviers cell and Abaaoud. Fearing an impending attack Belgian security services stormed the cell’s apartment killing two members of the network.

Law enforcement investigators discovered firearms, police uniforms and explosives. Based on the evidence security officials speculate that the 11 man cell may have planned an assault on police stations. Disrupting the Verviers network had profound ramifications. Abaaoud wanted to remotely direct the Verviers cell from Athens, Greece. Having his initial plans disrupted Abaaoud decided to travel to Europe and directly participate in IS’ terror campaign<sup>27</sup>. Fearing further police disruption, Abbaoud chose encrypted social media channels like Telegram and WhatsApp to communicate. His dark web activity unleashed the Paris assaults.

Beginning in January 2015 France was rocked by jihadi attacks and plots. One IS militant Amedy Coulibaly killed four people at the Hyper Cacher kosher grocery store timing it with AQAP sympathizers Said and Cherif Kouachi attack on the Charlie Hebdo editorial offices. The day before his attack on the grocery Coulibaly shot and killed a French policewoman. Coulibaly swore fidelity to IS organization whose publication Dabiq venerates his martyrdom<sup>28</sup>. Significantly the

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Charles Brisard and Kevin Jackson, Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 13-14.

<sup>26</sup> Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, “Radicalization in the U.S. and the Rise of Terrorism”, ibid.

<sup>28</sup> “Dabiq 7 The Extinction of the Grey Zone” accessed at: <https://clarionproject.org/docs/islamic-state-dabiq-magazine-issue-7-from-hypocrisy-to-apostasy.pdf> 68-74.

magazine's issue also features an interview with Abaaoud presaging the November 2015 Paris attacks<sup>29</sup>.

Though Abaaoud cannot be connected to the kosher grocery store attack, he is linked to aborted attacks in April and August 2015. Under Abaaoud's direction 24 year old Algerian jihadist Sid Ahmed Ghlam was guided to attack Parisian churches. Though he had limited training in Syria, he accidentally shot himself forcing him to contact medical authorities. His wounds aroused police suspicion. They found automatic assault weapons in his car and a search of his apartment revealed IS related material on his computer.

Abaaoud directed another IS fighter Ayoub el Khazzani to commit mass murder on a passenger train. Phone logs indicate extensive communication between Khazzani and Abacus<sup>30</sup>. Selecting a passenger train traveling from Amsterdam to Paris in August 2015 armed with a pistol and AK 47, Khazzani wanted to kill passengers. Though he shot one person he was subdued by three passengers when his automatic weapon malfunctioned. The disrupted church and passenger train attacks distracted law enforcement investigators enough to set up the caliphate's most spectacular European operation.

Planning for the November 2015 attacks was done in Belgium from multiple locations<sup>31</sup>. Salah Abdelsalem played a crucial logistical role. It was Abdelsalem that picked up members of the assault teams who arrived to Europe on fake Syrian refugees. Most entered Europe via Greece and Tukey with Abdelsalem meeting assault team members in Hungary and Austria transporting them to Belgium. He rented flats for the team in Paris and Belgium and the cars that ferreted them from Brussels to Paris. Though he did not participate in either the Paris or Brussels attacks, Abdelsalem is indelibly linked to both events.

His role in establishing the logistics for the November 13 assault is not surprising. Abdelsalem was a boyhood friend of Abaaoud and perhaps his most trusted confidant. By August 2015 the assault team was firmly established in Europe and the existence of safe houses rented under multiple identities insured that the network's security. Learning from the Verviers debacle communication between cell members was encrypted.

Brussels attacker Najim Laachraoui assisted in the fabrication of TATP (triacetone triperoxide) laden suicide belts. By early November team members had moved to Parisian flats and the decision to mount a devastating attack was imminent<sup>32</sup>. While Abaaoud oversaw the teams he was acting under the authority of Belgian "Abu Ahmad" who supervised the operation from Syria. Three teams were formed; each with a specific target. Abaaoud witnessed the carnage outside of the Bataclan Concert Hall and can be seen at the Paris Metro on CCTV footage during and after the attack. The chart below (Table 2) lists the target and the team members.

The most lethal attack was at the Bataclan where the American band The Eagles was playing. Having killed a security guard three terrorists entered the hall and began firing their automatic weapons at the crowd. When the police arrived they took hostages whom they eventually killed when they ignited their suicide vests. Some eighty concert goers were killed and hundreds more were wounded. The Stade de France attack could have been the most mortifying of the attacks with devastating political consequences. The stadium was packed with thousands of spectators with President Francois Holland watching a soccer match. Fortunately security was vigilant and their body search requirement dissuaded the three IS militants from entering the stadium.

Target	Bataclan Concert Hall	Stade de France	Bars and Restaurants
Attackers	Ismael Mostefai	Bilal Hadafi	Brahim Abdelsalem
	Sammy Amour	Two other terrorists suspected of being Iraqis using fake aliases still to be identified	Chakib Akrouh
	Foued Mohammed Agged		

**Table 2:** Lists the target and the team members.

Prevented from attacking inside the premises team members frantically telephoned their supervisors. Abaaoud and Ahmad were contacted by the frustrated team who decided to ignite their suicide belts killing only one passerby<sup>33</sup>. A third team of two assassins moved across central Paris attacking bars and restaurants killing some fifty people before immolating themselves.

Abaaoud sought to follow up the November 13th attacks with an assault on the Parisian commercial district La Defense. He would die with his cousin in a police shootout when their Saint-Denis hideout was discovered. Abaaoud's female cousin had spoken to a friend about the attacks who informed police. Following her police was able to discover Abaaoud's whereabouts. Resisting a commando raid three suspects were killed over a four hour shootout.

Investigators suspect that Salah Abdelsalem was to join his brother Brahim targeting restaurants but lost his nerve. Having ditched his suicide explosive vest he telephoned two Brussels friends who picked him up securely passing police checkpoints. When in Belgium he moved to multiple locations including a Moleenbek safe house close to his family home. He was a fugitive for four months. His arrest in mid-March 2016 may have hastened IS' Brussels attacks.

Criticized by French law enforcement officials for failing to disrupt the November 13th network Belgian security and police were frantic to abort future attacks. Working to unearth the remnants of the Paris attack network they discovered safe houses and arms caches. Closing in on Abdelsalem police were involved in firefight at a safe house killing one extremist. Information obtained at the location allowed

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 75-76.

<sup>30</sup> Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, *ibid*.

<sup>31</sup> Jean Charles Brisard and Kevin Jackson, *ibid*, 10-11.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

police to capture and arrest Abdelsalem. With his knowledge of their network IS' Belgian cell knew that immediate action was necessary.

Like the Paris attack trained fighters assaulted the Zeventum airport and Molenbeek metro on March 22, 2016. The caliphate's "soldiers" Ibrahim and Khalid Barkaoui participation in the Brussels attacks is celebrated in IS publications<sup>34</sup>. The Barkaoui brothers, Najim Laachaouri and Mohammad Abrini carried out near simultaneous attacks at multiple locations.

Having transported suitcase bombs and automatic weapons by taxi to the airport Ibrahim Barkaoui, Najim Laachroui and Mohammad Abrini hoped for a catastrophic attack. Had not one of the bombs not malfunctioned they may have realized their goal. When two of the bombs exploded over a dozen people were killed and hundreds were wounded. Having failed to ignite the bomb Abrini fled the attack site and was later arrested.

The subway attack was more lethal. Khalid Barkaoui exploded his suicide vest onboard a Metro car killing 18 people. By the end of the day 32 people were killed in Belgium's worst terrorist attack. The Paris and Brussels attacks utilized trained fighters. Since the March 22, 2016 attack we have not witnessed one assault featuring a foreign fighter sent to Europe by the Amniyat security branch. French police in March 2016 did arrest IS foot soldier Reda Kriket discovering a huge arms caches and explosives in his flat. Whether IS' remaining network is either destroyed or intentionally dormant is difficult to assess. Some fear that the May 2017 Manchester attack that killed 22 people at a music concert was an operation directed and financed by IS's external operations. What we can say with some confidence is IS's use of virtual guidance to attack Western homelands has not been idle.

### Directed virtual attacks by IS sympathizers

This type of remote control terrorism is testimony to IS' innovative external operations. Virtual direction uses social media channels to recruit, radicalize and guide supporter to kill Westerners. This can involve months of communications designed to bolster the potential assassin's determination. Targets can be discussed and methods of execution assessed between virtual planners and sympathizers. Virtual direction can reference IS manuals on how to construct explosive devices or what weapons to use in an attack. One issue of IS' English language Rumiya gives tactical advice on knife attacks<sup>35</sup>.

Encrypted technology like Telegram and WhatsApp guarantee secure private communication between virtual planners and sympathizers. It is an ideal forum to evade security services surveillance for it secures end to end messages. Within Europe IS can provide tactical assistance from the provision of funds and arms to sympathizers under virtual direction.

IS has a network of virtual planners divided into regional theatres. IS virtual planning operations in Europe has been dominated by Frenchman Rachid Kassim<sup>36</sup>Kassim is linked to plots and attacks

across France and Germany often involving alienated young people and psychologically troubled immigrants. His counseling has no doubt played a role in precipitating some violent acts. He was connected to two July 2016 attacks in Germany one by an Afghan immigrant who using a hatchet wounded four South Korean tourists on a passenger train and the other by a Syrian refugee who wounded 15 people when he ignited a suicide explosive vest outside of an Ansbach music concert. Before their violent acts the perpetrators posted loyalty pledges across the Islamic State's Amaq News Agency.

Prior to his death in a US airstrike, Kassim was virtually directing attacks by French militants. France's extremist community numbers in the thousands and is a receptive canvass for violent agitation. Young people in their teens and twenties have been targeted. Kassim communicated with one sympathizer that beheaded a police Captain and his companion in their Parisian apartment in June 2016 and in the following month convinced two militants to behead an elderly French priest in a small rural Church. He was also linked to an aborted plot in September 2016 by three female jihadists who under his direction aspired to attack a train station. The scheme was disrupted when police found an illegally parked car close to Notre Dame square containing the gas canisters to be used in the operation.

Robin Simcox reports 50% of the 34 IS linked plots in Western Countries involving teens were virtually directed<sup>37</sup>. Most of these attack schemes involved knives. With some 2,000 French teens radicalized the persistence of jihadi violence is likely<sup>38</sup>.

The caliphate prioritizes striking the United States by virtual direction. Strategically the use of virtual planning to inspire supporters into taking violent action is dictated by the lack of a direct network. The United States does not have a large radicalized Muslim Diaspora population. With only 250 US fighters traveling to Syria America's extremist community is small<sup>39</sup>. This does not mean, however, that the U.S. homeland is secure.

Since 2014 over a hundred people have been charged with IS related terrorism offenses<sup>40</sup>. Some 900 criminal investigations have been opened. Seventy people have been arrested for IS linked terror activity. Most of the criminal cases deal with IS recruitment, financial support and travel to Syria. Some, however, involved plots to kill Americans. Analysts point to the failed Garland, Texas Curtis Cutwell Center attack as the organization's opening salvo to kill Americans. One of its virtual planners British born Junaid Hussein communicated with Elton Simpson to attack the Center that was exhibiting Prophet Muhammad cartoons<sup>41</sup>. Equipped with automatic weapons Simpson and his partner were gunned down by a police guard before they could enter the complex.

Investigators point to Hussain's communications with Jostan Nolan Sullivan who was planning shootings in Virginia and North Carolina, Usaamah Rahil who sought to stab police in Boston, and Munir Abdulkader who aspired to behead a U.S. service man<sup>42</sup>. Another IS

<sup>34</sup> "Dabiq 14: The Murtad Brotherhood" accessed at: <http://clarionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/Dabiq-Issue-14.pdf>, 6-7.

<sup>35</sup> "Rumiya 2" accessed at: <https://clarionproject.org/factsheets-files/Rumiya-ISIS-Magazine-2nd-issue.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Robin Simcox, "The Islamic State's Western Teenage Plotters" CTC Sentinel 10:2 21-26.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>39</sup> Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, "San Bernardino and the Islamic State Footprint in America" CTC Sentinel 8: 34-36.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Seamus Hughes and Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, "The Threat to the United States from the Islamic State's Virtual Entrepreneurs" CTC Sentinel 10: 1-8.

virtual planner Abu Issa al-Amriki communicated with Emmanuel Lutman to launch a New Year's Eve attack and he sought to recruit Aaron Travis Daniels to travel to the caliphate as one of its soldiers.

Despite their lack of success in guiding IS' American sympathizers, U.S. national security planners take its virtual direction campaign seriously. Since 2015 the CIA and the military have prioritized killing IS' coterie of virtual planners eradicating Hussain and al-Amriki. Though the West may be able to kill Rachid Kassim and Junaid Hussain it is difficult to disrupt the inflammatory effect of IS' propaganda.

### Inspired attacks by IS supporters

The Islamic State's commitment to radicalizing Western Muslims is represented in its social messaging. Since its June 2014 caliphate proclamation, IS has erected a vast media empire designed to promote its ideology in the West. Its main line media enterprises expressed in multiple languages to encourage Muslims emigration to the lands of the caliphate. Barring this IS' Al Hayat's English language Dabiq, its successor Rumiya and its French publication Dar al Islam prioritize Western Muslims killing apostates in their native lands. Its Amaq News Agency enthusiastically publicizes the pledges of support for Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi by Western Muslims who are about to commit terrorism.

The caliphate's propaganda justifies its anti-Western violence through two arguments. First, it asserts that Western Muslims inhabit a grey zone that prevents them from practicing a correct form of Islam<sup>43</sup>. Secular democratic society denies Muslims their right to divinely inspired Sharia governance forcing them to abide by Western legal processes and customs that compromise their religious convictions. Western immorality, alcohol, homosexuality, and feminism is pilloried by IS propagandists who assert Muslim exposure to such filth has a corrupting influence. Western forms of "Islam" thus create a bastardized hybrid religion that abnegates the core foundation of Muslim belief. Second, IS propagandists argue the Crusader West is at war with Islam through its military operations against the caliphate obligating retaliatory defensive jihad.

IS' ideologues argue that Western Muslims live in a grey zone in countries at war with their faith. This creates an identity crisis that must be overcome by emigrating to the caliphate or killing Westerners in their native lands. Muslims who fail to defend their caliphate renounce their faith. The Islamic State's call for Muslim minorities in the West to kill apostates by any means has intensified with IS' military reversals. Europe and North America extremists have heeded the caliphate's calling and have used trucks to kill large numbers of people.

Using cargo trucks as death machines is another IS innovation. They have been employed in battles waged against enemies and as terrorist instruments to maximize civilian casualties. Two IS linked terror attacks in Europe have been especially destructive.

The Nice and Berlin attacks have striking similarities beyond the use of trucks as assault weapons. Both attackers were Tunisian nationals living an alienated life in the West. Nice attacker thirty-one year old Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhiesel worked for a trucking company. His troubled life included alcoholism, drug abuse, spousal abuse and

promiscuity. Twenty six year old Amri who carried out the Berlin attack had spent five years in an Italian prison for assault and theft. Neither Lahouaiej-Bouhiesel nor Amri were religious. They were radicalized later in life and may have viewed IS affiliation as an act of spiritual redemption.

Both were exposed to IS propaganda and were linked to pro IS jihadist preachers. Though Amri was radicalized in Italian prisons German Iraqi preacher Abu Wala intensified his extremism. Based in the North-Rhine-Westphalia and Lower Saxony regions Wala disseminated pro-IS literature and preyed upon young psychologically troubled men. French officials have linked Lahouaiej-Bouhiesel to IS literature and sympathizers. He reportedly was fascinated by IS execution videos<sup>44</sup>. Prior to the Nice attack he exhibited signs of religious devotion and had grown a beard.

Lahouaiej-Bouhiesel targeted a large Bastille Day crowd watching fireworks. Lightly guarded by French police checkpoints and with no concrete barriers denying entry to a vehicle the locale was attractive attack site. The Tunisian jihadist had scouted the area before the attack and meticulously planned the operation. With its nationalistic secular character an attack on Bastille Day was rife with symbolism.

Breaking through a police checkpoint and traveling at high speed Lahouaiej-Bouhiesel smashed his 19 ton cargo truck through hundreds of people celebrating on the Promenade des Anglais. He drove in a zigzag pattern to mow down escaping Bastille Day participants. He killed 86 people and wounded hundreds of others before police killed him. Inside the cabin investigators found automatic weapons and a pistol speculating that Lahouaiej-Bouhiesel sought to continue his rampage once he vacated his vehicle. His martyrdom inspired imitators.

Berlin attacker Anis Amri's case exemplifies the deficiencies of combating Islamist extremism in Europe. He came to Germany after Italian authorities had released him hoping for political asylum. With a criminal history and jihadi sympathies Amri's petition was rejected and he was awaiting deportation at the time he committed mass murder. Though German officials had detained Amri, he was released by a court order. Deportation was delayed until German authorities received verification of his Tunisian citizenship for German law forbids deportation without sufficient identity documentation. Amri's denial of asylum rights may have contributed to his decision to commit mass murder.

At a rest stop for truckers Amri shot and killed a Polish truck driver. Commandeering his cargo truck Amri drove uneasily around Berlin searching for a target. He chose a Christmas market where hundreds of people congregated plowing through a small barricade into the crowd. Had it not been for the truck's automatic braking system the carnage would be worse. After his rampage fourteen people died and dozens were wounded.

Amri evaded European authorities for days. After abandoning his truck CCTV footage captures him entering an Islamic Center infamous for extremist sympathies. He took a train to the Netherlands and then eventually a rail journey across France to Turin, Italy. Having stayed many years in Italy Amri could have had friends in Turin

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "The Future of Counterterrorism: Addressing the Evolving Threat to Domestic Security" February 28, 2017 Foundation for the Defense of Democracies accessed at: <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/HM/HM05/20170228/105637/HHRG-115-HM05-Wstate-JoscelynT-20170228.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> Dabiq 7, *ibid.* 58-66.

<sup>44</sup> Georg Heil, *ibid.*



will to provide a safe house. Questioned by Italian police outside the Turin station Amri died in a shootout with authorities. The Tunisian jihadist's ability to circumvent a police manhunt and travel across European countries underscores the pitfalls of the Continent's Schengen free movement agreement.

Amri posted a pledge of bay'ah to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi aired on Telegram by the caliphate's Amaq News Agency after his Christmas market attack<sup>45</sup>. Islamic State propagandists hail Amri and Lahouaiej-Bouhiel as their soldiers. The caliphate was so impressed by the Nice Attack that it generated an animated simulation of Lahouaiej-Bouhiel driving through a crowd of apostates justifying his martyrdom operation as retaliation for Crusader France's aggression against the caliphate

The Islamic State in the United States has less of a support base. There are no American equivalents to Sharia4Belgium or anything akin to the Abu Wala or Zerkani networks. American Muslims rarely live in cloistered unassimilated neighborhoods and most do not espouse radical causes. Though the caliphate has published kill lists of American police and military personnel, few heed the Islamic State's call. Where the caliphate has radicalized American supporters they usually involve attacks by mentally troubled immigrants. Most of these assaults involved the use of knives with college campuses or shopping malls Ohio and Caliphorniatargeted. Though dozens have been wounded there have been no fatalities. This does not mean that the caliphate cannot goad sympathizers with broad jihadi allegiances into committing mass murder. It has:

### Lone wolfs with multiple jihadi sympathies

Sam Mullins reports that 70% of IS linked terrorist acts in the West are conducted by lone actors<sup>46</sup>. Often the attacker's abrupt radicalization prompts spontaneous violence making the attack unproven. More often than not the perpetrator has a history of mental illness.

American extremists have overlapping jihadist allegiances easily transferable between organizations<sup>47</sup>. Often ignorant of the ideological divisions between Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, American extremists have cross hybridized jihadi sympathies. Affiliation with the Islamic State may be opportunistic and can revert back to Al Qaeda. Given the absence of an Islamist infrastructure on-line radicalization is a stimulant for IS linked violence in America. This was the case in the San Bernardino and Orlando attacks.

On December 2, 2015 US born Syed Rizwan Farook and his immigrant wife Tashfeen Malik killed 14 people and injured 22 others at an employee training event hosted by the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino. Farook was an inspector for the Country Department of Public Health and was attending the event. He left the meeting abruptly and returned with his wife some 40 minutes later. Armed with assault rifles they opened fire on those present in the banquet hall shooting over a hundred rounds. During the attack Malik expressed her support for IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on her Facebook page. Having killed over a dozen people Farook and Malik left the center. They drove their sports utility vehicle (SUV) for over four hours

around the San Bernardino until spotted by police. After being chased by law enforcement personnel on a roadway the couple stood their ground and were killed in a firefight.

Malik's participation in the attack is unusual. Rarely do spouses accompany their husbands on martyrdom missions. Her presence prompted speculation that she was a catalyst for Farook's radicalization. Though of Pakistani origin she lived much of her life in Saudi Arabia and met Farook via an online religious dating network. FBI Investigators highlight that the couple were radicalized over a number of years and their computer contained ample amounts of on-line extremist literature. Farook was infatuated with Anwar al Awlaki writings and was familiar with AQAP bomb making instructions.

With his friend and convert Enrique Martinez Farook conspired in 2012 to commit a terrorist act. Fearing FBI detection they abandoned their plans. Martinez purchased the rifles used in the San Bernardino attack and he was charged with criminal conspiracy to provide material support for terrorism. Police investigators found on a conference center table Farook's backpack full of pipe bombs based on AQAP blueprints and when they searched the couple's garage they discovered caches of ammunition and explosive material. Farook and Malik were planning a terror act for years and why they chose to kill scores of people attending the training event is unclear. We do know that Malik objected to her husband being forced to participate in a Christmas party following the training session. That may have been the impetus for the massacre.

What is clear is that the couple expressed multiple jihadi loyalties with Anwar al Awlaki writings especially influential. The caliphate's adoption of Awlaki call for attacks by Western Muslims in their native lands may have been a trigger for the couple's transference of allegiance to the Islamic State<sup>48</sup>. American jihadists have diffuse ideological convictions navigating across Al Qaeda, the Taliban and the Islamic State. American born Omar Mateen who on June 12, 2016 killed 49 people at the Pulse Nightclub had a similar incapacity to differentiate between extremist groups.

Born in New York Mateen grew up in Florida a troubled young man in an Afghan immigrant family. He exhibited few signs of religious devotion and he had a rudimentary understanding of the Islamic faith. Mateen's aspirations for a law enforcement career were dashed when his police academy application was rejected. He settled for private security work moving uneasily between jobs. Equally unsettled was Mateen's personal life and a failed first marriage. His ex-wife accused him of spousal abuse and mental instability.

Unlike Farook and Malik Mateen's jihadist sympathies were subject to a FBI inquiry. He was the target of two Department investigations between 2013-2014 centering on allegations from a former employer that he exhibited religiously motivated violent behavior and an inquiry based on his association with an Iraqi-American suicide bomber who died during an Al Nusra martyrdom operation. Mateen was briefly on the terrorist No Fly List. Having failed to establish a connection to a foreign terrorist organization the FBI in 2015 ended its investigation.

Mateen's motivation for attacking a nightclub that catered to a gay clientele prompted allegations that he was a homophobic gay incapable

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Sam Mullins, "The Road to Orlando: Jihadist-Inspired Violence in the West 2012-2016" CTC Sentinel 9: 26-32.

<sup>47</sup> Sarah Gilks, "Not Just the Caliphate: Non-Islamic State Jihadi Terrorism in the United States" George Washington University Project on Extremism accessed at: [https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu/files/downloads/Not%20Just%20The%20Caliphate\\_0.pdf](https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu/files/downloads/Not%20Just%20The%20Caliphate_0.pdf).

<sup>48</sup> Scott Shane, "the Enduring Influence of Anwar al-Awlaki in the Age of the Islamic State" CTC Sentinel 9: 15-19.

of reconciling his homosexuality with his jihadi sympathies. The Department of Justice investigation after the massacre found no evidence of Mateen's homosexuality. His second wife Noor Salmon accompanied him as he scouted out the nightclub as a potential target. She also went with him to the gun shop where he legally purchased he weapons. The Justice Department found enough evidence of complicity that it charged her with aiding and abetting Mateen's terrorist act.

After having stormed into the club firing an automatic rifle and pistol, Mateen took hostages into the ladies restroom. In his phone conversations with police he expressed solidarity with IS and Al Qaeda's Nusra Front calling the attack retaliation for the US bombing campaign against the caliphate. Like San Bernardino's Malik Mateen swore bay'ah to IS emir Baghdadi during his martyrdom mission.

After a four hour standoff with police a SWAT team blew a hole through on of the bathroom's walls and a police marksman killed Mateen. The FBI believes he was radicalized on-line and that he supported for a variety of terror networks. It could not, however, find any direct link to any foreign terrorist organization. In his rambling phone conversations with police he mentions the death of an IS commander in a US airstrike, the American war against the Taliban in Afghanistan and the death of a friend who fought on behalf of Al Qaeda's Nusra Front as justifications for his violence.

Shortly after the attack IS Amaq News Agency declared Mateen a soldier praising the massacre. IS's enthusiasm for Mateen's slaughter of homosexuals is consistent with its homophobic orientation<sup>49</sup>. The caliphate's denunciation of Western sexual immorality references homosexuality and the organization routinely kills gays by casting them off tall buildings. IS' discussion of the grey zone Western Muslims inhabit speaks to the corruption of faith caused by exposure to Western sexual freedoms. This may have impelled Mateen to target the Pulse Nightclub.

The Orlando massacre prompted increased security at Gay Pride events and homosexual clubs worldwide. IS' targeting of sports stadiums, concerts, night clubs, restaurants, cafes, shopping malls, churches, and trains leaves no target immune from the caliphate's wrath. As its state building project unravels in Iraq and Syria, what then could be the future in IS linked terrorism?

## Post Caliphate Terrorism?

Analysts are divided on whether IS can sustain its terror campaign in its post caliphate era. Some experts contend that the destruction of

IS state apparatus across Iraq and Syria, the depletion of its finances and the targeting of its commanders will diminish its capacity to mount operations<sup>50</sup>. IS virtual network of a planners and propagandists, moreover, have been hit severely by the coalition's targeted assassination campaign. Symbolically destroying IS proto-jihadist state derails its apocalyptic narrative and delegitimizes its ideology making it less attractive for its supporters.

Others, however, are pessimistic. The dismantling of IS' state could force the return of its foreign fighters to their native lands. With some 5,000 Western Europeans jihadi fighters repatriating France, Britain, Germany, and Belgium could experience a terrorism upsurge. In his ten year forecast of future jihadi terrorism Thomas Hegghammer predicts that Islamist terror in Europe will likely continue<sup>51</sup>. He connects the persistence of jihadi violence to four macro trends that involve the rise of economically marginalized Muslim youth, the growth of jihadi entrepreneurs, continued conflict in the Muslim world and the growth of internet based encrypted technology. Europe's Islamist micro culture and its elaborate network of extremist mosques and organizations provide support for jihadist violence. Thousands of young people in London, Brussels, Paris and Munich and other European cities have been indoctrinated with extremist ideas by jihadi entrepreneurs like Anjem Choudary, Khalid Zerqani, Fabien Cain and Abu Wala. Their incendiary rhetoric has driven them to fight in overseas wars and commit terror at home.

Jihadi terrorism is less severe in the United States. With only 250 foreign fighters (half of whom have died in Syria and Iraq) the threat comes less from returning combat veterans than with internet based homegrown radicalization. Significantly all of the Post 9-11 jihadi terrorism experienced in America is linked to native extremists radicalized across social media channels. The Fort Hood, Orlando, and San Bernardino shootings and the Boston Marathon bombing can be directly linked to internet based AQAP and Islamic State propaganda.

Though the caliphate's propaganda machine has been hurt by the targeted killing of its virtual planners and the depletion of its financial resources its social media channels continue to endure. Harleen Gambhir argues that internet based encrypted technologies make IS virtual caliphate a certainty<sup>52</sup> [3]. Given the persistence of sectarian antagonisms across the Muslim world and the resonance of Salafi-jihadist ideas among young extremists, IS linked terrorism though diminished is likely to continue.

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<sup>49</sup> Thomas Jocelyn, *ibid*

<sup>50</sup> James Jeffery, "How to Defeat ISIS: The Case for U.S. Ground Forces" January 4, 2016 Washington Institute accessed at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/how-to-defeat-isis-the-case-for-u.s.-ground-forces>.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, *ibid*.

<sup>52</sup> Harleen Gambhir, "The Virtual Caliphate" *ISIS' Information Warfare* The Institute for the Study of War December 20, 2016 accessed at: <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISW%20The%20Virtual%20Caliphate%20Gambhir%202016.pdf>.