

Violent Extremism and Countering Violent Extremism in the Homeland

11.3.17

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Introduction

Terrorism, [although a contest concept](#), can be defined as [the innocent killing of noncombatants to advance some political or ideological objective](#); and has been with us since [the beginning of recorded history](#). Since the terrorist attacks of 9-11-2001, the problem of terrorism has captured the attentions of national and international publics, informed by U.S.-led counterterrorism interventions at home and abroad. And [despite stereotypes](#), there is no predictive terrorist profile and no one group/culture has the monopoly on the threat, where terrorism has been perpetuated by religious and nonreligious group to advance their interests. [For example](#), since 9-11 people inspired by far-right ideology killed more civilians domestically at 68 post 9-11-01 than jihadist – until Omar Mateen’s terrorist attacks in June 12, 2016 at the Pulse Nightclub that killed 49 people and wounded 58, taking the total number killed by jihadists to 103. [Furthermore](#), based on data from the New America Foundation, people inspired by black nationalism have killed eight civilians during the same time period. To move beyond stereotypes, and put the reader in a position to help mitigate the threat, the domestic threat will be reviewed alongside corresponding responses to the threat.

The Domestic Threat

Despite the fact that al-Qaeda's hasn't successfully attacked the U.S. since 9-11, [ISIS/Daesh has taken al-Qaeda's place as the preeminent transnational terrorist threat](#) - driven by the 2003 U.S. invasion, occupation, and the 2011 redeployment of troops from Iraq. [At the time of writing](#), ISIS is largely defeated on the ground having lost the following: 60,000 - 70,000 fighters; Mosul in Iraq; most of Raqqa; and its last stronghold Deir al-Zour in Syria. When examining the threat to the homeland, returning foreign fighters have proven to be a bigger problem for Europe than the U.S, informed by Europe's proximity to Southwest Asia and Africa, [and the U.S.'s screening and defensive measures](#).

Nevertheless, since 2014 there has been seven deadly ISIS/AQ-inspired attacks in the U.S, killing over 80 people [based on the available data](#); all instigated by U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents, who were mostly radicalized online via ISIS propaganda and/or encrypted communications with already mobilized individuals from abroad.

Although the drivers of the threat are complex, [the available data suggests](#) that the “...Perpetrators (are) generally motivated by a mix of factors, including militant Islamist ideology; dislike of American foreign policy in the Muslim world; a need to attach themselves to an ideology or organization that gave them a sense of purpose; and a ‘cognitive opening’ to militant Islam that often was precipitated by personal disappointment, like the death of a parent.”

Responses to the Threat

In light of the threat, [there has been a wide array of approaches](#) that have been advanced to counter homegrown violent extremism:

- Preventive Policing: Instead of responding to traditional threats or incidents after a threat has occurred, law enforcement officers are taking more preventive postures akin to domestic intelligence gathering/operations. In other words, these officers/agents are interested in addressing threats before they emerge rather than after an attack, whether online or in traditional social networks.
- Fusion Centers: In these centers, federal, state, local, and tribal entities are working together to gather and share information about the threat environment.
- Investigative Approaches: Two primary investigative approaches have been deployed. The first is called the “Al Capone” approach where those suspected of terrorism are picked up and charged with lesser crimes like visa violations, etc. And the second approach involves the use of agent provocateurs, or informants, [which have produced various problems](#) (e.g. backlash from many civil libertarians, suspiciousness in many Muslim Community, etc.).
- Muslim Outreach: Towards establishing better relationships and gathering relevant information, many law enforcement and federal agencies are actively working with various Muslim Communities. This is facilitated by community engagement, local development projects, community policing, creating opportunities for dialogue, open door policies, hosting and participating in cultural events, etc. Nevertheless, there are reports of feelings of mutual distrust, challenges of being seen as “too” close the U.S. government, and issues dealing with religious and racial profiling.
- Countering the Narrative: This is an approach that focuses on prevention, with the aim of developing messages/interventions that counter the narratives that radicalize and mobilize individuals to be involved in terrorist attacks. It entails identifying [the Master Narrative of extremist groups](#), and

designing tailored campaigns to prevent, counter, and potentially mitigate the threat.

Many of the articles that follow from this author will build off of the available data on the threat, with a special emphasis on how to effectively counter the narrative of terrorists inspired by ISIS/AQ.