

Post-9/11 Islamic Extremism in the U.S.

The ideologies of extreme intolerance that motivated the 19 hijackers responsible for carrying out the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks continue to pose a serious threat to the U.S.

While no attacks of that magnitude have been successful on American soil in the ten years since 9/11, one of the most striking elements of today's terror threat picture is the role that a [growing number of American citizens and residents](#) motivated by radical interpretations of Islam have played in criminal plots to attack Americans in the United States and abroad.

Although they do not constitute a fully coherent movement in the U.S., more and more American citizens and residents are being influenced by ideologies that justify and sanction violence commonly propagated by Islamic terrorist movements overseas.

In addition to disagreements with perceived American actions against Muslims around the world, these extremists believe that the West (and America specifically) is at war with Islam and it is the duty of Muslims to defend the global Muslim community through violent means. They come from diverse backgrounds and, as a whole, do not easily fit a specific profile. About one fourth are converts to Islam who embrace the most extreme interpretations of the religion.

The most common targets in the U.S. have been [military installations](#), major landmarks, transit systems and [Jewish or Israeli institutions](#). In fact, hatred of Jews and Israel has played an alarming role in the radicalization process of many of these same homegrown extremists.

Although most individuals or groups lack the means and materials to carry out violent attacks – plots have been foiled by law enforcement at various stages – they continue to demonstrate a willingness to conduct attacks in the U.S.

Influenced by Terrorists Overseas

The past three years have been marked by an increase in the number of plots and conspiracies by homegrown Muslim extremists, as well as in the number of Americans attempting to travel abroad to train and fight with terrorist groups. The latter raises serious concerns about extremists using their American passports to return to the U.S. in order to carry out attacks on U.S. soil.

Indeed, the [failed attempt to bomb New York's Times Square](#) in 2010, as well as the foiled plot to detonate homemade explosives on New York City subways in 2009, were conceived by Americans who received training from terrorist groups overseas before returning to the U.S. to carry out the attacks.

Approximately 30 U.S. residents have attempted to or successfully traveled to Somalia to join [Al Shabaab](#), an Al Qaeda-linked terrorist group, since 2007 to receive weapons training alongside recruits from other countries. Several others have provided material support for the group through their recruitment and fundraising efforts.

A 27-year-old recruit from Minneapolis, [Farah Mohamad Beledi](#), was one of two suicide bombers who attacked a military base in the Somali capital Mogadishu on May 30, 2011, according to the FBI. A portion of the Al Shabaab audio statement claiming responsibility for the attack featured Beledi saying, "I have been a member of Al Shabaab for two years. I am from Minnesota, USA," and "I am so happy to turn my body into shrapnel for the infidels." Beledi is the second confirmed American suicide bomber. The first, Shirwa Ahmed, carried out a suicide bombing on behalf of Al Shabaab at the Ethiopian Consulate and the presidential palace in Hargeisa killing 24 people in October 2009.

Foreign terrorist organizations have also appealed to Western audiences through English-language propaganda distributed on a variety of online platforms, including materials specifically designed to recruit followers and sanction violence.

The ability of foreign terrorist groups to motivate Americans to join their cause is not limited to the Internet or to Al Qaeda-affiliated groups producing propaganda targeting westerners. For example, [David Coleman Headley](#), of Chicago, pleaded guilty to helping plan a number of terrorist attacks, including a series of coordinated attacks in November 2008 that killed more than 170 people in Mumbai. Headley conducted reconnaissance of a number of the targeted locations for [Lashkar-e-Taiba \(LET\)](#), the Pakistani-based Islamic terrorist organization. Several other American citizens have been charged with providing material

support to LET.

On-line Propaganda Encourages Terror

Many American extremists have been influenced by English-language terrorist propaganda and recruitment materials on Web sites, forums, blogs, social networking sites, video-hosting sites and other online platforms. These materials are filled with colloquial Western references and practical advice designed specifically for an American audience.

[Omar Hammami](#), an Alabama native who has become the public face and voice of Al Shabaab, has appeared in several videos urging foreigners "to come and live the life of a mujahid." In a March 2009 video, Hammami praised a killed fighter as a martyr and said, "We need more like him, so if you can encourage more of your children and more of your neighbors and anyone around you to send people like him to this jihad, it would be a great asset for us."

In addition, the media wing of [Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula \(AQAP\)](#), Al Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, has deliberately designed a portion of its propaganda to appeal to, engage and recruit sympathizers in the U.S. Since July 2010, AQAP has released several issues of its online English-language magazine [Inspire](#), which employs accessible Western references and colorful graphics in its calls to inflict mass casualties. AQAP, which has instructed readers to "fight jihad on U.S. soil," encourages participation in the production of the magazine, asking readers to contribute articles, quotes and images.

One recurring section in *Inspire*, entitled "Open Source Jihad," provides a resource manual for "Muslims to train at home instead of risking a dangerous travel abroad" and proposes several ways to wage "individual jihad" that inflicts mass casualties and economic losses. "We strongly encourage our brothers to fight jihad on U.S. soil," the author writes. "To kill a snake, strike its head." The [October 2010 issue](#) included a picture of the Chicago skyline, perhaps foreshadowing the [terror plot against Chicago-area synagogues](#) on October 29, for which AQAP claimed responsibility.

Mohamed Osman Mohamud, who was arrested in November 2010 for attempting to [blow up a Christmas tree lighting](#) with a car bomb in Portland, Oregon, submitted an article to *Inspire* (it was not published) as well as to another English language online terror magazine called *Jihad Recollections*.

Influence of Anwar al-Awlaki

[Anwar al-Awlaki](#) is among a growing chorus of Americans residing abroad who use their online pulpits to reach and influence audiences in the U.S. by repackaging ideologies of extreme intolerance and violence into digestible sound bites.

One indication of al-Awlaki's widespread influence is the number of extremists that have been found in possession of his materials. The list includes many of those arrested in 2010, among them [Antonio Martinez](#), a Maryland man arrested for attempting to detonate what he believed to be a car bomb at a Maryland army recruiting center in December; [Ahmed Farooque](#), a Virginia man who was arrested in October for allegedly plotting attacks against Metro stations in the Washington Metropolitan Area and [Barry Walter Bujol, Jr.](#), a Texas resident arrested for attempting to deliver money and other equipment to AQAP.

Anwar al-Awlaki's mass appeal has also resulted in his taking a public role with [Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula \(AQAP\)](#), Al Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen and Saudi Arabia that has deliberately designed a portion of its propaganda to appeal to, engage and recruit sympathizers in the U.S.

Many others have been influenced by al-Awlaki as well, most notably [Nidal Malik Hasan](#), who allegedly killed 13 people at the Fort Hood army base after exchanging emails with al-Awlaki. The shooting at Fort Hood followed a separate incident in June 2009 when [Abdulahkim Mujahid Muhammad](#) allegedly shot two uniformed American soldiers, killing one of them, at a military recruiting center in Arkansas.

While most of the plots in the U.S. have been foiled by law enforcement before they were carried out, the Fort Hood and Arkansas attacks demonstrate the particular danger posed by so-called "lone wolf" extremists who, though unaffiliated with terrorist groups, share their radical interpretations of Islam and ideological goals.

ADL's Role in Fighting Islamic Extremism

As part of its ongoing effort to combat Islamic extremism, ADL has:

- Issued reports detailing the growing and increasingly dangerous domestic terror threat posed by American Muslim extremists, which has been very helpful to law enforcement as well as Congress in hearings held to assess current threats.
- Shared analysis and resources with Rep. Peter T. King (R-NY), Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, and other committee members on how homegrown extremists are influenced by terrorist propaganda and recruitment materials on various online platforms.
- Distributed *Terrorism Update*, an online publication that details trends in domestic terrorism.
- Provided training to law enforcement officers around the country.
- Shared actionable intelligence with law enforcement agencies.
- Assisted in an FBI investigation into Zachary Adam Chesser, arrested in July for providing material support to an Al Qaeda-linked terrorist group, communicating threats and seeking to incite crimes of violence. ADL had been tracking Chesser's extensive online activity since 2009.
- Received commendation from FBI Director for assistance in preventing a terrorist plot to blow up a courthouse.
- Cited by national and international media, including *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, CNN, FOX News, ABC News and the BBC.
- Provided the Library of Congress's Congressional Research Service extensive information for its report, "American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat," released in September 2010.