

# Homegrown Islamic Extremism in 2013

## The Perils of Online Recruitment & Self-Radicalization

The Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013 served as a tragic reminder of the persistent threat posed to the United States by homegrown extremists motivated by the ideologies and objectives commonly propagated by Islamic terrorist movements overseas. The bombing also underscored the significant influence and impact of online terrorist propaganda on a new generation of homegrown Islamic extremists.

As Internet proficiency and the use of social media grow ever-more universal, so too do the efforts of terrorist groups to exploit new technology in order to make materials that justify and sanction violence more accessible and practical. Terrorist groups are not only using Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and various other platforms to spread their messages, but also to actively recruit adherents who live in the communities they seek to target.

Face-to-face interaction with terrorist operatives is no longer a requirement for radicalization. Individual extremists, or lone wolves, are increasingly self-radicalizing online with no physical interactions with established terrorist groups or cells – a development that can make it more difficult for law enforcement to detect plots in their earliest stages.



*Promotional video for Al Qaeda's new Resurgence Magazine*

In his testimony to the House Committee on Homeland Security in February, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson directly acknowledged this risk and the need “to address the threats we face from those who self-radicalize to violence, the so-called lone wolf who may be living quietly in our midst, inspired by radical, violent ideology to do harm to Americans – illustrated last year by the Boston Marathon bombing.”

In 2013, 14 American citizens or permanent residents were implicated in the U.S. on terror-related charges, ranging from domestic plots and conspiracies to providing material support to terrorists abroad. Many were directly influenced by propaganda easily accessible on online.

And this number does not account for all the Americans that have traveled to or attempted to travel to Syria to fight with militants, including Al Qaeda-affiliated groups, according to U.S. intelligence officials. Nor does it account for foreign nationals that have been arrested in the U.S. on terror related charges.

While the fundamental ideological content of terrorist propaganda has remained consistent for two decades – replete with militant condemnations of perceived American transgressions against Muslims worldwide, appeals for violence and anti-Semitism – terrorists groups are now able to reach, recruit and motivate homegrown extremists more quickly and effectively than ever before by adapting their messages to new technology. One clear indication of the success of these efforts is the number of homegrown extremists that have been found in possession of terrorist propaganda.

Although most homegrown Islamic extremists have lacked the capacity to carry out violent attacks – plots have been foiled by law enforcement at various stages – the Boston bombing showed how two brothers influenced by online terrorist propaganda can terrorize our communities and undermine our security.

### Domestic Plots & Conspiracies

Although they do not constitute a fully coherent movement in the U.S., homegrown Islamic extremists – American-born citizens, naturalized U.S. citizens and permanent residents – who are radicalized online pose a significant domestic terror threat.

There have been 31 plots in the U.S. over the past five years alone. American citizens and permanent residents have planned or been intricately involved in 26 of the plots, typically targeting military institutions, major landmarks, Jewish institutions and populated areas.

In the past, plots were directed by foreign terrorist organizations or their affiliates and recruitment and planning generally required some direct, face-to-face interaction with terrorist operatives. Indoctrination came directly from extremist peers, teachers or clerics. Individuals would then advance through the radicalization process through constant interaction with like-minded sympathizers or, as the [2007 NYPD report](#) on radicalization described, with a “spiritual sanctioner” who gave credence to those beliefs.

Today, individuals can find analogous social networks, inspiration and encouragement online, packaged neatly together with bomb making instructions. This enables adherents to self-radicalize without face-to-face contact with an established terrorist group or cell.

*Boston, Massachusetts: April 15, 2013*

The actions of Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the alleged perpetrators of the [Boston Marathon bombing](#) which killed three people and injured 264 others, illustrate the magnitude of the threat. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the surviving bombing suspect, reportedly told law enforcement officials that he and his brother were inspired by [Anwar al-Awlaki](#)'s radical online sermons.



*Anwar al-Awlaki*

Awlaki, an American-born Muslim cleric killed in a U.S. drone strike in Yemen in 2011, encouraged attacks against the West on behalf of Al Qaeda through dozens of English-language videos, articles,

books and lectures. Awlaki inspired numerous homegrown extremist to join terrorist groups overseas and to attempt to carry out terrorist attacks in the U.S., including [Nidal Malik Hasan](#), who killed 13 people and wounded 32 others at the Fort Hood Army base in Texas in November 2009.

Indeed, the Tsarnaev brothers learned how to make the pressure cooker bombs they planted at the Marathon from [Inspire magazine](#), an online English-language propaganda magazine produced by [Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula \(AQAP\)](#) to which Awlaki contributed. In addition to containing the very bomb-making instructions that the brothers later utilized in their attack - in an article called "[How to Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom](#)" - *Inspire* provided various other articles encouraging attacks in U.S. soil.

For example, an article in the magazine's second issue encouraged "brothers and sisters coming from the West to consider attacking the West in its own backyard. The effect is much greater, it always embarrasses the enemy, and these types of individual attacks are nearly impossible for them to contain."

The eleventh of *Inspire*, released in May 2013 as a "special edition" honoring the "[Blessed Boston Bombings](#)" claimed credit for the Tsarnaev brother's actions. "Yes, the brothers have been inspired by *Inspire*. This is not only because *Inspire* offers bomb recipes, but also because of the contents of the magazine as a whole."



*Tamerlan Tsarnaev as featured in Inspire*

In addition, Tamerlan Tsarnaev apparently watched videos made by an Australian preacher named [Feiz Mohammad](#), who is known for his extreme anti-West views.

*Wichita, Kansas: December 13, 2013*

Online terrorist propaganda also played a significant role in another 2013 bomb plot in Wichita, Kansas. Terry Lee Loewen, also known as Terry L. Lane, was arrested on December 13, 2013, for attempting to plant a bomb on the tarmac of the Wichita Midcontinent Airport in Kansas. He is currently in prison awaiting trial.

Loewen, a 58-year-old convert to Islam, claims to have "become radicalized" through the website [Revolution Muslim \(RM\)](#), a fringe extremist group based in New York that [inspired numerous domestic extremists](#) by promoting Al Qaeda messages legitimizing violence against Americans, in particular against Jews and Jewish institutions.

Loewen told an undercover officer that the group's website was "the first website that really helped me understand what obedience to Allah was." He also claimed to have read *Inspire* magazine, to have sought guidance from Anwar al-Awlaki's online sermons and to have "downloaded tens of thousands of pages" of materials related to "jihad, martyrdom operations and implementation of Sharia law."

According to the criminal complaint, Loewen said he was trying to support AQAP by committing “an act of violent jihad” and that had been sending money to the family of [Younnus Abdullah Muhammad](#), co-founder of Revolution Muslim.

### *Other Plots*

Matthew Aaron Llaneza was arrested on February 8, 2013, for allegedly attempting to detonate a bomb at a Bank of America branch in Oakland, California. Llaneza, a convert to Islam, was charged with attempting to use of a weapon of mass destruction, which he constructed with the help of an undercover FBI agent whom he thought was connected to the Taliban. Llaneza had a history of mental illness and it remains unclear how he became radicalized and what role the Internet may have played in his radicalization.

In addition, Erwin Antonio Rios was arrested in North Carolina in a sting operation on May 14, 2013, for possession of a stolen firearm that he had purchased from an undercover agent as part of an apparent plan to murder U.S. military personnel at Ft. Bragg. Rios, too, was influenced by the writings of Anwar al-Awlaki and possessed at least one book written by the radical cleric, which he cited as justification for his acts. Court documents indicate that Rios believed “there was religious justification for using weapons against non-believers.” He pleaded guilty to a non-terror charge of possessing a stolen firearm as part of a plea deal in May 2013.

As technology develops, so too does the sophistication of terrorist organizations seeking to influence others around the globe. Terrorist groups are increasingly crowdsourcing their efforts by encouraging their audiences to take part in the production of propaganda, providing articles, photos and technical skills. This technique serves as a means of engaging individuals along the path to radicalism. And several Americans have responded.

For example, Mohamed Osman Mohamud, who in 2010 attempted to detonate explosives at a Christmas tree lighting ceremony in Portland, Oregon, responded to such solicitation by submitting his writing to the terrorist magazine *Jihad Recollections*. While the content of his articles - for example, “[Getting in Shape Without Weights](#)” - was generic, the publication of his article played a role in his radicalization process.



“Getting in Shape Without Weights” in  
Jihad Recollections

The following sampling of American citizens and permanent residents arrested over the past five years for plotting attacks in the U.S. further illustrates the central role that online terrorist propaganda plays in the radicalization process.

New York, New York: November 29, 2012 – [Raees Alam Qazi](#)

Chicago, Illinois: September 15, 2012 – [Abdel Daoud](#)

Tampa, Florida: January 5, 2012 – [Sami Osmakac](#)

New York, New York: November 19, 2011 – [Jose Pimentel](#)  
Seattle, Washington: June 22, 2011 – [Abu Khalid Abdul-Latif](#)  
Washington, DC: December 14, 2010 – [Awais Younis](#)  
Portland, Oregon: November 26, 2010 – [Mohamed Osman Mohamud](#)  
New York, New York: June 17, 2010 – [Faisal Shahzad](#)  
Fort Hood, Texas: November 5, 2009 – [Nidal Malik Hasan](#)

### Material Support For Terror

Americans traveling abroad to join terrorist groups have been a consistent threat since 2001, with three distinct waves of travel apparent. Between 2001 and 2005, Americans travelled mostly to join Al Qaeda Central and the Taliban. Between 2007 and 2011, travel and support were especially directed at Al Shabaab, Al Qaeda’s affiliate in Somalia, coinciding with significant English-language propaganda being disseminated by that organization aimed at recruiting Americans – especially by its American spokesperson [Omar Hammami](#) before he was killed in 2013 by members of Al Shabaab.

Travel to Syria – the greatest threat since 2011 – has been the third wave. The ongoing conflict in Syria served as a flashpoint for the global terrorist movements throughout 2013. Although some individuals were initially attracted to join the conflict on humanitarian or political grounds, many others specifically traveled to Syria for the purpose of linking up with a terrorist groups operating in the area.

U.S. intelligence estimates indicate [at least 70 Americans](#) are believed to have attempted to travel to Syria in the past three years; of those, [at least 50](#) have successfully done so. These numbers augment the nearly 2,000 fighters from Western Europe and up to 11,000 foreign fighters total believed to have joined the Syria conflict.

Many of these Westerners, including Americans, are believed to have joined Al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al Nusra (JN) and the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL), which was affiliated with Al Qaeda until February 2014. Al Qaeda’s central organization severed ties due to infighting between ISIS and other Islamist groups in Syria and ISIS’s refusal to follow orders to exit Syria and stay in its original base in Iraq.

CIA director John Brennan described the situation in his February 2014 testimony to the House Intelligence Committee. “We are concerned about the use of Syrian territory by the Al Qaeda organization to recruit individuals ... to use Syria as a launching pad,” Brennan said. Similarly, during a meeting with reporters in January, FBI director James B. Comey described the need to track Americans who travel to Syria and then return to the U.S. as one of the FBI’s highest counterterrorism priorities.

Of those Americans traveling and attempting to travel to Syria, [seven were publicly identified in 2013](#). Four are known to have used social media such as Facebook and Twitter to broadcast their support for terrorist groups and two went so far as to use social media to describe their activities while in Syria.

Two also appeared in propaganda videos aimed at English-speaking audiences and distributed online by the terrorist groups they had joined. And at least one was so convinced of the Internet's potential to help him join terrorist organizations that he directly searched for how he could do so.

The details surrounding these known incidents, listed below, further highlight the role of the Internet in encouraging Americans to join the conflict.

- [Sinh Vinh Ngo Nguyen](#), a convert to Islam also known as Hasan Abu Omar Ghannoum, was arrested in October 2013 in Santa Ana, California, for attempting to travel to Pakistan to join Al Qaeda, as well as for providing false information on a passport application. Nguyen, who reportedly traveled to Syria in December 2012, actively posted about his activities in Syria on Facebook, with posts such as, “I’m doing well in Syria...having a blast here, and I mean literally,” and another that apparently “confirmed his first kill” and expressed eagerness for more. Nguyen pleaded guilty to a federal terrorism charge in December 2013 and is scheduled for sentencing in March, 2014.
- [Eric Harroun](#), a former American soldier and a convert to Islam, was arrested in March 2013 in Virginia for conspiring to use a weapon of mass destruction while fighting with JN. After arriving in Syria he appeared in a JN propaganda video. Harroun also actively posted and bragged about his activities in Syria on Facebook as well as on YouTube, including multiple images of himself with guns and grenades. Harroun wrote on Facebook that the “only good Zionist is a dead Zionist.” In September, Harroun pleaded guilty to violating a law regulating munitions exports and was released from prison.
- [Amir Farouk Ibrahim](#), an Egyptian-American born in Pittsburgh, reportedly traveled to Syria in the spring of 2013. His American and Egyptian passports were discovered in a compound once held by ISIS, leading some observers to believe he had been fighting with the terror group. Ibrahim regularly posted materials supportive of international terrorism on Facebook and YouTube, ranging from a condemnation of French forces battling Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Mali to praising the killer of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh.
- [Abdella Ahmad Tounisi](#) was arrested in Chicago in April 2013, for allegedly attempting to join JN in Syria. Tounisi conducted extensive online searches to learn about opportunities to join terrorist groups in Syria, including multiple searches on terms related to martyrdom, JN, Ayman al-Zawahiri (the head of Al Qaeda central) and [Adam Gadahn](#) (an English-language Al Qaeda propagandist), according to court documents. He even conducted searches on Eric Harroun. Court documents indicate that he also watched videos and read articles by Anwar al-Awlaki and AQAP's media branch. Ultimately, Tounisi encountered a website created by the FBI that



*Eric Harroun's Facebook profile*

purported to recruit individuals to travel to Syria and join JN. He initiated contact to the email address linked to that site, indicating a willingness to die in Syria and asking for instructions on joining the group. Tounisi was arrested at Chicago's O'Hare airport. Tounisi pleaded not guilty in May 2013.

- Nicole Mansfield, a convert to Islam from Michigan was killed in Syria in May 2013. According to Syrian state-controlled media, she was killed in a car along with two others, including a Briton, while fighting with the rebels. Syrian media claimed that JN's flag was found in the car.
- [Basit Javed Sheikh](#), a Pakistani-born U.S. permanent resident, was arrested on November 2, 2013, at Raleigh-Durham International Airport headed for Syria. According to an affidavit presented for his arrest, Sheikh regularly posted to Facebook about joining Islamist rebels in Syria and was a member of the JN Facebook group. Sheikh allegedly created at least seven Facebook profiles in his eagerness to communicate about extremism online, several of which were removed from the site for violation of terms of service; among his alleged posts were statements such as, "Let the mujahideen [religious fighters] kill them and destroy [American soldiers]...Allah give victory to Sheikh Usama [bin Laden]" and quotes from sources praising martyrdom. Sheikh ultimately joined a Facebook page created by the FBI that purported to promote extremist Islam and began to regularly converse with an undercover FBI agent over Facebook, Skype and email.

The seventh identified individual is known only by his assumed name, [Abu Dujana al-Amriki](#). He was featured in a video allegedly created by ISIS that was posted to YouTube on November 18, 2013. In the video, Abu Dujana al-Amriki, whose name and accent suggest that he is an American, holds a rifle and addresses his message "to the people of the West."

"We've come here from all nationalities to defend this land," he says, "to spread the *Shariah* (religious law) of *Allah* on the face of the earth, and to give our lives and our souls for this *jihad* and to *Jannah* (Paradise)." The video also alleges that he died in Syria.



Man identified as Abu Dujana al-Amriki in a video allegedly created by ISIS

### *Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)*



Inspire magazine

Syrian groups are not the only foreign terrorist organizations attracting Americans. As in previous years, Americans continued to try to join [AQAP](#), which has attempted to strike within the U.S. on at least three occasions, including the [January 2010 "underwear" plot](#) to blow up an airplane flying to Detroit and an [October 2010 plot](#) to send explosive-laden packages addressed to Jewish institutions in Chicago on U.S.-bound cargo flights.

Through [Inspire magazine](#), AQAP insists that aspiring terrorists can serve the

group better by staying in the West and attacking their home countries, rather than traveling to Yemen. An article in its May 2012 issue told readers “that attacking the enemy in their [sic] backyard is one of the best ways to help the jihad.”

Despite these instructions, three Americans attempted to join AQAP in Yemen 2013:

- [Shelton Thomas Bell](#), a convert to Islam, was arrested in Jacksonville, Florida, on January 29, 2013. Bell allegedly downloaded terrorist propaganda from the Internet, including speeches and lectures of Osama bin Laden and [Ayman al-Zawahiri](#), and researched travel to Yemen online. Bell had also engaged in physical, firearms, and other training in preparation for what he described as “the actions of jihad,” including “a night-time mission” in which they vandalized religious statues at a Jacksonville cemetery. Bell also allegedly made video and audio recordings for the purpose of soliciting and recruiting others to participate in violent jihad.
- [Justin Kaliebe](#), a convert to Islam, was arrested in New York on June 25, 2013, for attempting to travel to join AQAP. Kaliebe had accessed online information from multiple terrorist propagandists including Anwar al-Awlaki, Omar Abdel Rahman, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Osama bin Laden. He also allegedly swore loyalty to AQAP via email, writing, “I pledge my loyalty, allegiance and fidelity to the Mujahedeen [religious fighters] of Al-Qaa'idah in the Arabian Peninsula and its leaders, Shaykh Abu Baseer Nasir Al-Wuhayshi and Shaykh Ayman Al-Zawahiri, hafidhahum Allah [may God protect them]!” In a statement following Kaliebe’s arrest, US Attorney General Patrick Lynch stated that Kaliebe “found both inspiration and guidance in the online teachings of al-Qaeda leaders,” emphasizing that the Internet is “used as a platform for al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups to spread their poisonous propaganda.”
- [Marcos Alonso Zea](#), a convert to Islam, was arrested in New York on October 18, 2013, for attempting to join AQAP and for encouraging Justin Kaliebe to do likewise and providing Kaliebe with financial support. Zea’s computer contained significant amounts of downloaded terrorist propaganda, including editions of *Inspire* magazine, video by Al Qaeda in Iraq showing the bombing of a vehicle carrying western military personnel, and pictures of the 9/11 attacks.

Such travel, whether to Yemen, Syria or elsewhere, not only strengthens the foreign terror organization by increasing its numbers, but also solidifies the traveler’s own radical views and can further their militant training. The traveler then has an increased potential of returning to the U.S. with new skills and motivation to plan domestic attacks.

This scenario played out in 2010 when [Faisal Shahzad](#), a naturalized U.S. citizen who had trained with the Pakistani Taliban, returned to the U.S and attempted to detonate a bomb in Times Square. Similarly, [Najibullah Zazi](#) attended an Al Qaeda training camp in Pakistan before attempting to carry out a suicide bombing in the New York City subway system in 2009.

### *Al Shabaab*

Although no Americans are known to have attempted to travel to Al Shabaab in 2013, over 50 American citizens and permanent residents have attempted to join or aid the group, primarily between 2007 and 2012.

In 2013, Al Shabaab continued to actively recruit Americans, primarily through videos featuring American expats. Following its internationally publicized [September attack on the Westgate hotel](#) in Nairobi, Kenya (a location chosen because “there are Jewish and American shops. So we have to attack them”), Al Shabaab [claimed via Twitter](#) that three Americans had taken part in the attack. Although Al Shabaab’s claims proved to be false, the claim showcased the group’s interest in promoting its American supporters and can be considered part of its effort to recruit others to join its ranks.

In [congressional testimony](#) provided in October 2013, Rucj Stanek, the Sherriff of Hennepin County in Minnesota, stated: “Some of these young men return ... [posing] a significant threat to our community by preying on vulnerable individuals for material or direct support, or by carrying out an attack in the United States.” Dozens of young Americans have joined Al Shabaab from Minnesota, which has a significant Somali community.

The following sampling of American citizens and permanent residents arrested for attempting to join terrorist groups abroad over the past five years further illustrates the role of online terrorist propaganda in the radicalization process.

Atlanta, Georgia: December 11, 2012 – [Randy Wilson](#)

Los Angeles, California: November 19, 2012 – [Sohiel Omar Kabir, Ralph Deleon, Miguel Alejandro, Arifeen David Gojali](#)

Laurel, Maryland: January 6, 2012 – [Craig Baxam](#)

Chicago, Illinois: August 3, 2010 – [Shaker Masri](#)

Fairfax, Virginia: July 21, 2010 – [Zachary Chesser](#)

Houston, Texas: May 30, 2010 – [Barry Walter Bujol, Jr.](#)

New York, New York: June 5, 2010 – [Carlos Eduardo Almonte and Mohamed Mahmood Alessa](#)

New York, New York: September 24, 2009 – [Betim Kaziu](#)

### **Anti-Semitism**

Anti-Jewish and anti-Israel themes have consistently permeated English-language terror propaganda intended to reach and appeal to Western audiences. Al Qaeda has been particularly focused on exploiting hatred of Jews and resistance to the State of Israel in an effort to connect with, appeal to and ultimately recruit a cadre of would be-jihadists in the United States.

Al Qaeda’s ability to link its opposition to America with its animosity toward Jews and Israel has been a staple of its ideology for years, alleging that Jews are the eternal enemy of Muslims and the embodiment of true evil. Al Qaeda-affiliated extremists and those who have adopted a similar ideology have long referred to their enemies as “Zionist-Crusaders,” the “Jewish-Crusader Alliance,” or the “Jews and

Crusaders,” thereby identifying Jews as a key component of the forces they view being at war with Islam.

This ideology has led to [attacks against distinctly Jewish targets around the world](#). In 2013, Al Shabaab attacked the Westgate mall in Nairobi, Kenya. According to an Al Shabaab spokesman, the location was chosen because “there are Jewish and American shops. So we have to attack them.”



Page from Al Shabaab Magazine Gaidi Mtaani calling Jews the “worst enemy of Islam”

*Inspire Magazine*

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)’s online English-language magazine *Inspire*, created in 2010, demonstrates how an ideology rooted in the hatred of Jews can be used as an effective tool to attract and radicalize potential recruits. Specifically designed to engage and recruit sympathizers in the U.S., *Inspire* is saturated with anti-Jewish and anti-American narratives, employs colloquial Western references, colorful graphics and practical advice in its calls to inflict mass casualties.



Page from Inspire magazine

For example, in the first pages of the [October 2010 issue](#) of *Inspire*, the editor warned that they will “not lay down their arms until they free this land from the tyrants and march on to Jerusalem. That is when America and its Jewish masters would realize the true danger of AQAP.”

In November 2010, [AQAP claimed responsibility](#) for a mail bomb plot involving Chicago-area Jewish institutions. The AQAP statement, which threatened additional attacks against American interests, also vilified Saudi Arabia for their alleged cooperation with the Jews and for providing intelligence that enabled Western officials to locate and diffuse the explosive-laden packages. “Allah has exposed your true servitude to the Jews, for these devices were heading towards Zionist Jewish synagogues, but you interfered with your known treachery to protect them.”

The packages were addressed to what AQAP described as synagogues “in Chicago, Obama's city,” because AQAP is “facing a coalition of Crusaders and Zionists” and “will never forget Palestine.”

The May 2013 issue of *Inspire*, which [celebrated the April 15 Boston marathon bombing](#) and encouraged future attacks against the U.S., included an article titled *The Inevitable* by Abu Ziyad Al-Muhajir. It described the “Blessed Boston Bombings (BBB)” as an “absolute success” and quoted Osama bin Laden thusly: “As you kill, you will be killed until you leave our lands and stop supporting Israel.”

### *Revolution Muslim*

Perhaps the most influential organization in the U.S. to take its cues from Al Qaeda was the New York-based [Revolution Muslim](#) (RM), which used its website to berate and threaten Jews and Jewish institutions. The group's website, YouTube channel and associated online forums [attracted a following](#), including several individuals who have been implicated in terror-related activities.

U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia Neil H. MacBride highlighted the threat posed by the group to national security, citing the string of terrorism cases with ties to the organization and warning that "we may never know all of those who were inspired to engage in terrorism because of Revolution Muslim."

In 2013, however, the group came one step closer to its demise when [Youssef al-Khattab](#), the group's co-founder and former leader, pleaded guilty in October 2013 to using the Internet to threaten Jewish organizations.

The extent of Al-Khattab's [threats against the Jewish community](#) on the RM site was jarring. They included a video encouraging viewers to seek out the leaders of Jewish Federation chapters in the U.S. and "deal with them directly at their homes;" directions to specific Jewish facilities alongside a link to a manual for constructing and using explosive devices and a message encouraging readers to "make EVERY attempt to reach these people and teach them the message of Islam;" and a poem listing ways that Jews can be hurt including throwing "liquid drain cleaner in their faces" and burning "their flammable sukkos while they sleep."



*Youssef al-Khattab*

While 2013 did not see plots or conspiracies by homegrown Islamic extremists against Jews or Jewish institutions, anti-Semitism continues to be intrinsic to the ideology of foreign terrorist organizations and their adherents in the U.S.

In the past five years, several homegrown Islamic extremists, arrested on a range of terror-related charges, have been [motivated, in part, by hatred of Jews and Israel](#). Several cases also demonstrate a significant online component, including:

#### **2012 – Florida**

[Sami Osmakac](#), a naturalized American citizen from Kosovo, was charged in a plot to attack various sites in Tampa and take hostages. Prior to his planned attack, he had written rap lyrics about bombs and killing Jews, according to a former classmate. In a number of videos posted to YouTube, Osmakac is heard railing against Jews, accusing them of corrupting religion and killing prophets, and comparing them to the devil.

#### **2011 – Pennsylvania/Virginia**

[Emerson Begolly](#), an American citizen who pleaded guilty to soliciting acts of terrorism, exhibited rabid anti-Semitism in his extensive online activity. Many of his messages were explicitly anti-Semitic,

calling for the death of all Jews and encouraging others to target synagogues, Jewish schools and day care centers. In response to the Israeli naval operation to stop a flotilla of ships en route to Gaza in May 2010, Begolly wrote and recorded a tribute to the "Activists Who were Martyred, Wounded, and Imprisoned at the Hands of the Zionist Pigs." The song, which is entitled "When the Jew's blood reds my knife, then my life is free from strife," threatens to "throw them [the Jews] in the ovens" and to "shoot and kill Jews one by one."

### **2010 – Virginia**

[Zachary Chesser](#), an American convert from Virginia who was sentenced to 25 years in prison for attempting to join an Al Qaeda-linked terrorist group based in Somalia, communicating threats, and soliciting crimes of violence, distributed terrorist propaganda materials online and espoused hatred against Jews and Israel prior to his arrest. In a February 2010 online discussion hosted by RM, Chesser wrote, "May Allah blow up the Jews..." In an interview two months later, Chesser warned that peace will only be established with "a complete withdrawal of non-Muslim forces from Muslim lands [and] an ending of the propping up of the apartheid regime of Israel."

### **2009 – Texas**

[Nidal Malik Hasan](#), an Army psychiatrist from Virginia who allegedly killed 13 people and wounded more than 30 others at the Fort Hood Army base in Texas, expressed his support of killing Jews and Israelis in a series of e-mails exchanged with American Muslim cleric Anwar al-Awlaki prior to the attack. Hasan also reportedly mentioned various justifications for "targeting the Jews with rockets" in e-mails sent to al-Awlaki.

### **2009 – Pennsylvania**

[Colleen LaRose](#), an American convert who pleaded guilty in 2011 to recruiting potential terrorists online, posted comments about Jews on several online forums. On a message board called Islamic Emirate Forum, LaRose criticized Adolf Hitler for not killing more Jews. "I mean look at the terrible things the jews (joos) have done to our Ummah... indeed they are a cancer to the world as a whole.so [sic] yes i [sic] wish Hitler would have finished the job," she said. In another post in response to an anti-Semitic comment made by a member of the Islamic Thinkers Society, a New York-based group that justifies terrorist attacks and other forms of violence, LaRose wrote, "LOL@ bashing yahoods [Jews]...dont have ALL the fun akhi [brother], save some for others to terrorize....BAAHAAHAAHAA!" LaRose's MySpace profile reportedly included the message: "I support all the Mujahideen [Muslim warriors] I hate zionist & all that support them!"

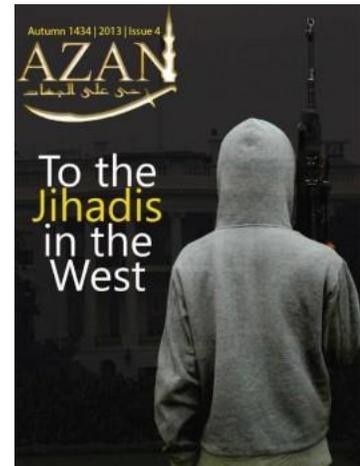
### **Conclusion**

The significant influence and impact online terrorist propaganda has had on a new generation of homegrown Islamic extremists cannot be overstated. Although the number of extremists arrested has varied slightly from year to year, the overall threat is one that requires constant vigilance.

2013 saw increasing numbers of militant groups previously active in their local provinces using the Internet to expand their reach by delving into English-language propaganda aimed at influencing and recruiting Westerners to their cause. For example, the Abtalul media group, an Afghanistan based

propaganda organization operating in support of the Taliban began publishing [Azan](#), an online jihadist magazine modeled closely after AQAP's *Inspire* magazine.

Azan and a various other new propaganda sources have emerged as others have declined in 2013. In September, Omar Hammami, Al Shabaab's former primary English-language spokesman, killed, likely by Al Shabaab leadership. In October, Revolution Muslim leader Youssef Al-Khattab pleaded guilty in U.S. court for making threats against Jews. Despite these apparent blows, both sources continue to radicalize and encourage new followers, and serve as a model for the newer sources of radical propaganda.



Azan magazine

The same lasting influence can be seen with terrorist ideologues like Anwar Al-Awlaki, who was killed in a U.S. drone strike in 2011. Awlaki, who inspired a generation of terrorists in the U.S. and abroad through his online propaganda, continues to reach audiences well after his death through various online platforms, including a Facebook page called "Generation Awlaki."



"Generation Awlaki" Facebook page

The page, made up of images of Awlaki and many of his most militant sayings, is attracting more followers every day. Among the quotes by Awlaki featured on the page are, "Running away from Jihad will not save you from death. You can die as a coward or you can die as a Martyr." The highlighted quotes also touch on relevant political flashpoints, such as fighting against Israel. "The Palestinian issue should be something we think about day and night," reads one recently posted quote.

Numerous comments have been left on the page, primarily in English. In fact, many of the followers of the page seem to be from English-speaking countries, including Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. This attests to Awlaki's continued appeal to Western audiences, which he worked hard to influence and radicalize during his lifetime. "Generation Awlaki" is followed most heavily by 18 to 24 year olds, ages associated with increased receptivity to extremism.

Terrorist use of the Internet to incite violence and to influence Americans continues to expand each day. [The newest issue of \*Inspire\* magazine](#), released in March 2014, refers to radicalized Americans to encourage others to follow in their footsteps. One week before its release, As-Sahab, the media wing of Al Qaeda's central organization, released a video promoting yet another upcoming English-language magazine called *Resurgence*.

Over video footage of the Boston Marathon bombing, a voiceover (a speech by Malcolm X) states: "They only know one language," alluding to violence. "You can't ever reach a man," the voiceover continues, "if you don't speak his language." Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups continue to amplify and propel the homegrown Islamic extremist threat by promoting their language of violence online in English.

**Appendix: Domestic Terror Related Arrests in 2013***US citizens and legal residents*

- January 29, 2013: [Shelton Thomas Bell](#), 19-year-old U.S. citizen arrested in Florida for attempting to join Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.
- February 7, 2013: **Erwin Antonio Rios**, 19-year-old U.S. citizen arrested in a sting operation in North Carolina for possession of a stolen firearm that he had acquired in a plan to murder U.S. military personnel as part of a personal jihad at Fort Bragg in North Carolina.
- February 8, 2013: [Matthew Aaron Laneza](#), 28-year-old U.S. citizen with criminal history and possible mental illness arrested in a sting operation in California for attempting to bomb a Bank of America branch in Oakland, California.
- March 5, 2013: [Reaz Qadir Khan](#), 48-year-old naturalized citizen of Pakistani origin arrested in Oregon for providing material support to terrorists in the form of advice and financial assistance to a suicide bomber who had carried out an attack abroad on behalf of Al Qaeda.
- March 27, 2013: [Eric Harroun](#), 30-year-old U.S. citizen with criminal history and possible mental illness arrested in Virginia for conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction outside the U.S. (fighting with Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria).
- April 19, 2013: [Dzhokhar Tsarnaev](#), 19-year-old naturalized citizen of Russian/Chechen origin arrested in Massachusetts for use of a weapon of mass destruction and willful destruction of property resulting in death in conjunction with the Boston Marathon bombing. [Tamerlan Tsarnaev](#), Dzhokhar's brother and alleged co-conspirator, 26-year old legal permanent resident, was killed April 19, 2013.
- April 19, 2013: [Abdella Ahmed Tounisi](#), 18-year-old U.S. citizen arrested in a sting operation in Chicago for attempting to travel to Syria to join Jabat al-Nusra. He had also been involved in a bomb plot with Abdel Daoud but backed out after fearing involvement by law enforcement.
- May 16, 2013: [Fazliddin Kurbanov](#), 30-year-old Uzbek national legally in the U.S. arrested for providing material support to the terrorist organization Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and for teaching others how to make bombs that could be used in public places and on public transportation.
- June 25, 2013: [Justin Kaliebe](#), 18-year-old U.S. citizen arrested in New York in a sting operation for attempting to travel to Yemen to join Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.
- October 10, 2013: **Humayoun Ghoulam Nabi**, a 27-year-old Pakistani national legally residing in the U.S. and **Ismael Alsarrabi**, 32-year-old naturalized citizen of Kuwaiti origin arrested for attempting to provide warm clothing and equipment to the Taliban.

- October 11, 2013: [Sinh Vinh Ngo Nguyen](#), aka **Hasan Abu Omar Ghannoum**, 24-year-old U.S. citizen arrested in a sting operation California for attempting to travel to Pakistan to join Al Qaeda. Nguyen had allegedly also fought with Islamist groups in Syria.
- October 18, 2013: [Marcos Alonso Zea](#), 25-year-old U.S. citizen arrested in a sting operation in New York for attempting to travel to Yemen to join Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and for encouraging Justin Kaliebe to do likewise and providing him with financial support.
- November 2, 2013: [Basit Javed Sheikh](#), 29-year-old permanent resident of Pakistani origin arrested for attempting to join Jabhat al-Nusra (Al Qaeda in Syria).
- December 13, 2013: [Terry Lee Loewen](#), 58-year-old U.S. citizen arrested for attempting to detonate a bomb at the Wichita Mid-Continent Airport.