Following the Siren’s Call ISIS Lures American Youths

Capstone Paper

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Acknowledgements

This paper is dedicated to all of the teenagers that I have had the privilege of teaching. And to my fellow colleagues and educators, perhaps the most important lesson that you will teach in your classroom is one of love, inclusion, and acceptance.
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Abstract

American teens are targeted as key recruits of the Islamic State. ISIS is pursuing and radicalizing younger recruits, and they are utilizing an aggressive strategy to enlist them. There is evidence that ISIS employs a gradual process of indoctrination, using targeted propaganda and social media to lure school aged children to their cause. The Islamic State is enticing teens from both sexes to either travel to the caliphate in Iraq and Syria, or to commit acts of terror in the United States. ISIS preys on teens that are feeling marginalized and isolated from society. This paper examines why ISIS has been so successful recruiting teens in the United States. For the purposes of this study, teens are defined as individuals between the age of 13 and 19. The United States needs an improved preemptive counterterrorism strategy that utilizes community engagement from schools, teachers, mentors, and law enforcement to help detect radicalization.
Introduction

The Islamic State is recruiting teenagers at an increasing rate both inside the caliphate and internationally. The scheme of exploiting teens is not new for terrorist organizations; Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, and the Taliban have all recruited young soldiers to carry out attacks. ISIS has had more success luring teens from Western countries than any other contemporary terrorist group. Definitions of what constitutes the “West” or “Western countries” vary, for this paper it will include North America, Europe, and Australia. Teens from the United States are being persuaded by ISIS to commit acts of terrorism, to become foreign fighters, or to marry ISIS fighters in the caliphate. The Islamic State’s savviness with social media, targeted propaganda, and peer recruitment strategies have convinced some young Americans that ISIS is fighting for a just and worthy cause, and that they will be part of a revolutionary movement.

The Rise of ISIS as a Regional and International Threat

ISIS separated from Al-Qaeda in early 2014 over fundamental differences in philosophy. Al-Qaeda perceived building a Muslim caliphate as a distant goal, while ISIS had an aggressive and imminent agenda (United States of Jihad 7). Osama bin Laden dreamed of a caliphate stretching across the Middle East, but he did not believe that it would happen in the near future (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 7). In 2014, ISIS claimed large swaths of land in both Iraq and Syria, including significant population centers, such as Mosul, the 2nd largest city in Iraq (United States of Jihad 7). Within months of conquering Mosul, ISIS added several affiliated terrorist groups from around the Muslim world, stretching across the Middle East and beyond (United States of Jihad 7). According to Sasha Havlicek, CEO of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, “The reality of the ‘Caliphate’ is what distinguishes ISIS from al-Qaeda and other jihadist organizations. The fact of occupying a geographic territory, which actually and purely manifests the ideology rather than merely ideals and hopes, is extremely significant. This territory has created a destination point, giving real-world credibility to ISIS’s message” (Havlicek 10).

As ISIS gained new territory, they conducted a mass murdering campaign against “infidels” in the conquered land, which included Shia, Kurds, Yazidis, and Christians. ISIS forced the occupants of the seized territory to obey their authority, or be killed. Shiites and individuals that assisted the American troops in Iraq were considered infidels (McCants 37). Jews and Christians living in the Islamic State were forced to submit to ISIS’ authority and pay a security tax, or be executed (McCants 37). The ISIS ideology assumes that the end times are upon us, and ISIS is fighting a holy war against “infidels”. ISIS enforces a draconian interpretation of sharia law over the caliphate including throwing homosexuals to their death from tall buildings, a strict dress code, violent executions, and enslaving and raping minority women (United States of Jihad 7).

ISIS created what it believes to be an Islamic utopia, and they are trying to reinstate the Caliphate that ended after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire almost a century ago (Jihadist Terrorism 15 years after 9/11 13). When ISIS began to gain significant ground in Syria and Iraq in 2014, the strategy was to build the caliphate and they encouraged foreign followers to join. The announcement of the caliphate was revolutionary for many extremists (Jihadist Terrorism 15 years after 9/11 13). ISIS started a new recruitment campaign and encouraging a wider
audience to join the caliphate (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 7). ISIS promotes the caliphate as not just a place for soldiers, but for families (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 8). ISIS has pledged religious schooling for boys and girls, and families are assured homes, stipends, and abundant social services (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 8). ISIS likely did not tell their supporters in the caliphate that the homes they would be given were seized from locals who had been evacuated, and the incomes ransacked from banks, smuggling, and abduction ransoms (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 8).

Although ISIS is focused on retaining their territory in Iraq and Syria, they have also declared strongholds in parts of Afghanistan, Libya, Egypt, and Algeria. ISIS recruiters have told foreign fighters to travel to these locations if they cannot make it to Iraq and Syria (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 8). ISIS has accepted pledges of allegiance from other terrorist organizations, such as Boko Haram. In contrast to al-Qaeda, ISIS does not require a strenuous and lengthy procedure for groups to become a franchise, enabling ISIS to grow faster and farther (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 9). ISIS leaders have stated “if the Muslim finds it hard to flee to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria through Turkey, he can escape to the Islamic State in Libya, Afghanistan, or in Nigeria” (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 9). ISIS’ expansion into these territories has created a plethora of options for jihadists. Not only does this make it harder for the United States to defeat ISIS militarily, but it also increases the challenges that law enforcement agencies have in tracking citizens who try to join ISIS abroad (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 10).

An ISIS magazine entitled Dabiq is one of their main propaganda tools. Dabiq is a Syrian town, where according to ISIS dogma will be the destination for the end times. They believe that a final battle will take place between Muslims and Christians, and Muslims will triumph over the “infidels” before the world ends. In the third issue of Dabiq, an ISIS writer stated, “This life of jihad is not possible until you pack and move to the Khilafah” (Jihadist Terrorism 15 years after 9/11 13). ISIS has persuaded many teens to depart their homeland and travel to the caliphate with the belief that this is “The Final Jihad” (Gorka and Gorka 6).

**Methodology**

The purpose of this research is to analyze why ISIS has been so successful recruiting teens in the United States. This paper will examine the emerging trends of ISIS’ recruitment techniques and the “push” and “pull” factors that are contributing to U.S. teens joining ISIS. Current research and government reports are utilized to detect tendencies of ISIS’ teen recruitment and for data analysis. The data were collected from a variety of open sources, including House Homeland Security Committee reports, the George Washington Program of Extremism, New America Data, Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, the FBI, and several news articles. The data for this research is primarily qualitative.
ISIS Recruitment Efforts: Outreach to U.S. Foreign Fighters

Foreign fighters are individuals that depart their homeland, and join or assist in waging Jihad abroad (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 4). For decades, American citizens have travelled to jihadist strongholds to enlist with terrorist organizations and many foreign fighters have returned with nefarious motives (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 4). The term “jihadist” will be used to describe individuals that have endorsed militant Islamic beliefs because this a reference that radical Muslims use to describe themselves (United States of Jihad 10). The number of U.S. citizens travelling abroad to engage in terrorist activities has been alarming to law enforcement agencies. Western governments are concerned that they will not be able to prevent violent jihadists from returning to their countries (Homeland Security Committee 9). Former FBI Director James Comey advised that the United States needs to be prepared for a larger “terrorist diaspora” from Iraq and Syria (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 5). The most imminent fear about foreign fighters is that they will commit a terrorist attack against their homeland or recruit other Westerners. A study in 2013 found that one out of nine Western jihadists were involved in terrorist attacks when they returned home (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 11). Peter Neumann, a counter-terrorism expert from the United Kingdom outlined the concerns about foreign fighters stating, “We don’t know whether they will act today or tomorrow, but what we do know is that in five, 10, 15 years, not just next month, they will pose a danger. They’ve had military training; they’ve set up networks” (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 13).

ISIS has convinced recruits that if they travel to the caliphate they will triumph over the West in the final battle, and achieve a glorious afterlife. ISIS presents itself as an authentic state with ample social services and a caliphate where reverent young Muslims can escape persecution from the West and find perfect marriage partners (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 10). ISIS convinces young Western recruits that there is something thrilling and revolutionary about escaping their humdrum lives in the West to join the caliphate (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 10). Initially, ISIS was victorious in taking over large swaths of land in Iraq and Syria. In 2014, they released footage of ISIS militants bulldozing the great sand berm that demarcated the Iraq-Syrian border, a symbolic destruction of the Sykes-Picot agreement made between the British and French in 1916, that divided the Ottoman Empire into British and French control after World War I (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 11). This was ISIS’ way of proclaiming that Western influences and control will be eradicated. In controlling a large territory or a caliphate, ISIS achieved what al-Qaeda never did.

A significant wave of foreign fighters answered the call to join the caliphate. Since 2014, the world has witnessed a substantial international union of jihadists, as individuals from over 100 countries have migrated to the caliphate in Iraq and Syria (Homeland Security 2015). There are an estimated 6,900 Western fighters who have migrated to fight in Iraq and Syria, the vast majority traveling from European countries (Bergen, Sterman, Sims, Ford, 21). Almost thirty percent of EU citizens who joined the fight in Iraq and Syria have returned to Europe (Boutin et al 3). U.S. foreign fighters that return home are not the only security threats. European foreign fighters also pose a serious risk, equipped with military experience and jihadist connections; many of them have European passports and have easy access to U.S. cities (Homeland Security Committee 2015 6). While individual national intelligence agencies monitor the movement of
terrorists around the world, there is no shared comprehensive international database tracking foreign fighters (Homeland Security Committee 2015 6). Countries rely on a patchwork system, which raises the likelihood that foreign fighters plotting attacks in Western countries will slip through the cracks. In spite of improvements that have been made since 9/11, intelligence agencies are still inconsistent and unreliable in the manner that they share information about terrorist suspects (Homeland Security Committee 2015 6). Foreign fighters have assumed the responsibility of enlisting a younger generation of terrorists, striving to lure teens and radicalize Westerners online (Homeland Security Committee 2015 8).

Foreign fighters have encouraged a rise in extremism internationally by enlarging jihadist networks, provoking individuals to plot attacks against the West, or by returning to their home country to commit acts of terrorism themselves (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 3). U.S. citizens and residents have been recruited in unprecedented numbers and continue to travel to jihadist strongholds, posing counterterrorism challenges for the United States (Homeland Security Committee 2015 15). Despite increased measures to halt the flow of foreign fighters, law enforcement agencies have largely failed to thwart U.S. citizens and residents from migrating abroad to join ISIS in Syria and Iraq (Homeland Security Committee 2015 6). It is estimated that over 85 percent of Americans seeking to join ISIS have evaded U.S. law enforcement and reached the caliphate (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 15). Several individuals have even gone back and forth between the United States and Syria several times (Homeland Security Committee 2015 23). According to the Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives report in October 2015, the swift rate at which ISIS is radicalizing individuals is straining law enforcement’s ability to track and arrest recruits. Former FBI Director James Comey claimed that at least 250 Americans have reached or attempted to reach the caliphate in Iraq and Syria (Bergen, Sterman, Sims, Ford, 3). An estimated one-fifth of these Americans were teenagers, of whom more than a third is female (Bergen, Sterman, Sims, Ford, 3).

![American Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria](chart)

**Source:** New America Data (Bergen, Sterman, Sims, and Ford 3)
The Profile of U.S. Teens Drawn to ISIS

Overall, al-Qaeda has been unsuccessful in enlisting Americans or other Westerners (Gorka and Gorka 6). Al-Qaeda has focused mainly on recruiting conservative Muslims that were motivated to protect Muslim lands (Gorka and Gorka 7). Al Qaeda has been extremely selective about who they recruit, they have limited propaganda videos, and they prefer to meet recruits in person (Gorka and Gorka 7). In comparison, ISIS has a broader appeal and the number of ISIS followers in the United States is estimated to be in the thousands (Gorka and Gorka 16). From March 2014 to November 2015, there were 82 individuals in the United States affiliated with ISIS that were interdicted by authorities, including 7 minors (Gorka and Gorka 8). There was an average of 4.1 ISIS arrests per month in the United States during this time frame (Gorka and Gorka 8). By contrast, in the 10 years following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, an estimated 176 Americans were interdicted because they were affiliated with al-Qaeda. This was an average of 1.5 al-Qaeda arrests per month (Gorka and Gorka 8). The United States detained 300 percent more ISIS recruits on average from March 2014 to November 2015, than al-Qaeda terrorists on American soil in the decade after 9/11 (Gorka and Gorka 8). ISIS is generating a much more extensive following, and American law enforcement agencies are still adapting to their style.

There is no homogenous ethnic profile that defines American teen recruits that join ISIS. They are from a variety of races and ethnicities (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11 9). Teens from diverse religious backgrounds including even atheists, Christians, and Jews have joined ISIS (How to Stop ISIS from Recruiting American Teens). Americans drawn to ISIS hail from every corner of the United States, the FBI is investigating cases in all 50 states (Bergen, Sterman, Sims, and Ford 10). Beyond the increasing trends of women and teens, there is little homogeneity of ISIS supporters, posing a challenge for law enforcement (Bergen, Sterman, Sims, and Ford 10). According to former FBI Director James Comey, the Americans who become foreign fighters have a similar profile to other Western fighters: they are young, women are well represented, many have family ties to jihad, and they are notably active online (Bergen, Sterman, Sims, and Ford 10). For most of these recruits, their turn to radicalization was inspired at least in part by a desire for recognition or belonging, often both (United States of Jihad 16). According to former FBI Director James Comey, “It isn’t a particular demographic or geography. It’s about people seeking meaning in their lives in a misguided way” (Tucker).

 Teens that have joined ISIS are not homogenous in motivation either. Colonel John M. Venhaus referred to the reasons that American teens join jihadist groups claiming that some are “revenge seekers looking for an outlet for their frustration, status seekers looking for recognition, identity seekers looking for a group that they can belong to, and thrill seekers looking for adventure” (Venhaus). The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) claims that Americans that embrace ISIS tend to be disenfranchised, and searching for belonging, meaning, or identity (ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa 16). Another common theme is moral outrage at U.S. foreign policy in the Muslim world (United States of Jihad 12).

 However, the most common characteristic of American teens drawn to ISIS is that they are involved in online jihadist networks (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 9). The majority of American teens that have joined ISIS became radicalized after viewing ISIS propaganda online or connecting with ISIS recruiters on social media, and many have had limited face-to-face interaction with extremists (Jihadist Terrorism 15 years after 9/11: A Threat Assessment 10). Social media has dramatically accelerated the radicalization process,
teens that visit ISIS social media sites and share ISIS propaganda can be instantly in touch with ISIS recruiters that they have never met in person. The majority of Americans recruited by ISIS were radicalized at least in part on-line, either through ISIS propaganda or peer recruiting on social media (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 18). Around 80 percent of the Americans that have been radicalized by ISIS were active in either viewing jihadist propaganda, sharing it on-line, or interacting with other jihadists on social media sites (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 18).

A representative case is that of the Khan family. Mohammad Hamzah Khan, a 19-year old from a Chicago suburb purchased three airline tickets for himself and his two younger teenage siblings. The Khans planned to fly from Chicago to Istanbul. Mohammad met an ISIS recruiter online who organized the trip from Istanbul to ISIS’ headquarters in Raqqa. Khan did not discuss his plans with his parents, and only left them a letter before leaving with his siblings, explaining that ISIS has created the ideal Islamic caliphate and he felt compelled to be there. The FBI arrested the three Khan teenagers at O’Hare airport in October 2014. Although Mohammad Khan failed to reach Syria, he faced up to 15 years in prison for trying to offer “material support” to ISIS (Jihadist Terrorism 15 years after 9/11: A Threat Assessment 10).

Since Khan pled guilty, he received a five-year sentence and must continue to cooperate with law enforcement (Jihadist Terrorism 15 years after 9/11: A Threat Assessment 10). The Khan family hired Thomas Durkin to defend Mohammad in court (United States of Jihad 6). Durkin described his client as a true believer who was lured by the siren call of ISIS’ slick propaganda, and wanted to join the “perfect” Islamic state (United States of Jihad 6). Durkin claimed with the absence of social media, his client would have never been persuaded by ISIS’ message (United States of Jihad 6).

Another example is Shannon Conley, a 19-year old from Colorado. Conley had recently converted to Islam after researching the tenets of the Muslim faith online (Storey). She adopted an extremist stance after connecting with ISIS recruiters online and reading jihadist material (Storey). After converting she became interested in Anwar al-Awlaki, a Yemeni American who planned various terror plots and was killed in a drone strike in 2011 (Speckhard). Al-Awlaki preached that Muslims have a duty to carry out jihad, either on the battlefields or at home (Speckhard). Conley downloaded al-Qaeda manuals and thought about carrying out attacks in the United States, until she realized that she probably would not succeed (Speckhard). In the meantime, she met a Tunisian ISIS fighter online and fell in love (Storey). Conley informed her father that she met a boyfriend online, and she wanted her father to meet him on a skype call (Storey). During the chat, the couple declared that they would be united in marriage, and Conley would be moving to Syria. After Shannon’s father tried to convince her to change her mind, he discovered a one-way plane ticket to Istanbul (Storey). On April 8, 2014 Conley was arrested at the Denver airport before boarding the flight. Conley was charged with attempting to provide “material support” to ISIS, and is serving a four-year sentence in federal prison (Storey).

In October 2014, three high school girls from a Denver suburb skipped class to depart to Syria after connecting online with ISIS recruiters (Paul and Finley). The three teen girls, two sisters of Somalian descent age 17 and 15, and another 16-year old girl of Sudanese descent were halted in Frankfurt, Germany before they could make their connecting flight (Paul and Finley). The high school girls admitted that they stole $2,000 from their parents to fund the trip. The Sudanese teen’s father told investigators that he was alerted by her school that she skipped class, and he called her to check on her and she claimed that she was running late, and never returned
home (Paul and Finley). The girls were stopped in Germany and sent back in to Denver, where the FBI greeted them on their return (Paul and Finley).

**Why is ISIS targeting Teen Girls?**

ISIS is pursuing an aggressive strategy of recruiting American teenage girls online (Bennhold). An unprecedented amount of Western teenage girls are submitting voluntarily to a jihadist terrorist organization (Havlicek). Most are young and single, typically in their teens or early twenties (Bennhold). According to Institute of Strategic Dialogue, the majority of Western female migrants joining ISIS are between 15 and 25 years old. There are a significant percentage of 16 year olds, and the age of female recruits is dwindling, the youngest known Western recruit is a 13-year-old girl from Germany (Havlicek). According to Sasha Havlicek, “Indeed, Western female recruits are by and large younger than male recruits, in part as a function of ISIS’s drive to recruit ever younger girls. Not only is there a greater need to supply wives for the thousands of foreign fighters from all over the world who have joined ISIS, but also these men want women that speak their language while also being young enough to ensure that they are unwed and untainted” (Havlicek).

The Islamic State is making a diligent attempt to lure girls from Western countries, fashioning their siren’s call to their vulnerabilities and selling them a utopian fantasy of life in the caliphate (Havlicek). A heavy dose of propaganda and enticing recruitment strategies have been overwhelmingly successful. Teenage girls are “pulled” to the caliphate for a variety of reasons. Some are seeking adventure, rebellion, romance, a sense of religious obligation, or they are intrigued by the propaganda-fueled fantasy that the Islamic State is a utopia (Bennhold). Some of these girls are seeking a counterculture, where rebellion is expressed through radical religious views that oppose Western norms, and feminism is conveyed in a head scarf (Bennhold). Brigitte Lebans Nacos, a professor at Columbia University stated, “They often appear to be typical teenagers. They ask about hair dryers. They’re looking for romance. They’re fans of ISIS, like others are fans of pop stars” (Petrou). For the Islamic State, every young Western girl that submits to ISIS is an ideological victory over the West. According to Sasha Havlicek, “For the girls, joining ISIS is a way to emancipate yourself from your parents and from Western society that has let you down. For ISIS, it’s great for troop morale because fighters want Western wives. And in the battle of ideas they can point to these girls and say, look, they are choosing the caliphate over the West” (Bennhold).

The goal for ISIS is to seduce teen girls to be brides for ISIS soldiers (Tucker). ISIS creates propaganda specifically targeting teenage girls for this role (Storey). ISIS leaders are recruiting women because they want to build a legitimate state, and they want families (Petrou). To women, the ISIS message is that they are valued and respected for the role that they play in raising the next generation (Havlicek 9). Teenage boys are encouraged to fight for their faith; girls are sold the concept of sisterhood and raising the next generation of jihadists (Storey). Women are barred from combat; they support the caliphate as wives, mothers, and recruiters. However, women are provided with some military training, signifying that they could be asked to fight in the future (Havlicek 11). One assignment for Western women in their teens or early twenties is to be a member of the Khansa Brigade. These women roam the streets with guns and...
grenades policing “unIslamic” behavior, dress codes, and unleashing brutal punishments on women who do not conform to their strict religious laws (McCants 113).

Many of the girls from Western countries that join the Islamic State are given the full-time job of recruiting girls just like them (Storey). They use social media to befriend other girls online and seduce them to join ISIS. ISIS recruiters are tasked with creating a fantasy narrative of the Islamic State to entice other women. The ISIS propaganda recruitment machine is extremely sophisticated and targeted. Sasha Havlicek proclaimed, “From the iconic memes, to the go-pro footage from the field that mimics the imagery of popular video games, to the Twitter amplification apps and peer to peer- in this case, girl to girl- engagement that would be the envy of most social media marketing companies, ISIS has taken the Jihadist propaganda machine to the next level with obvious effect” (Havlicek 8).

William McCants, a Brookings Institute fellow describes ISIS as having a “cult-like pull” (Petrou). Some of these girls are traveling to Syria with a naïve and joyous optimism of what life will be like in the Islamic State (Petrou). However, to assume that these girls are naïve to ISIS’ brutality and violence would be incorrect (Havlicek 10). Women do not just celebrate the violence; they justify it according to Sharia Law (Hoyle, Bradford, Frenett 29). The girls are just as violent as the male members of ISIS in their communications online (Havlicek 10). The women in the caliphate are conditioned to glorify ISIS’ violence and brutality and share the gruesome content online (Havlicek 11). After an ISIS woman watched Islamic State militants behead eighteen Syrian hostages and an American aid worker she proclaimed, “So many beheadings at the same time, Allahu Akbar, this video is beautiful” (McCants 114).

Many women have advocated their desires to engage in battle. The Islamic State does not allow women to fight on the front lines. Some women dream of fighting with the men, one woman tweeted “I wonder if I can pull a Mulan and enter the battlefield” (Petrou). Ironically, this tweet is in reference to the popular Disney movie Mulan, which suggests that although ISIS shuns Western culture, they are still influenced by it (Petrou). Umm Ubaydah, the woman who wished to become Mulan stated, “maybe the time for us to participate is soon” (Hoyle, Bradford, Frennett 36). One of the most prevalent risks is that female migrants can encourage terrorist attacks in the West or inspire others to travel to Iraq and Syria (Hoyle, Bradford, Frennett 34). Umm Layth encourages young Muslims to lash out writing, “cannot make it to the battlefield then bring the battlefield to yourself. Be sincere and be a Mujahid wherever you may be” (Hoyle, Bradford, Frennett 34).

Why is ISIS Recruiting Teens?

Teens with no prior police records are ideal because they often fly below the radar of authorities (Faiola and Mekhennet). Intelligence agencies are often unaware of the threats posed by radicalized teens, because they are legally not allowed to monitor minors in the manner that they track adults (Faiola and Mekhennet). German law enforcement agencies claim that tracking teens is a major counterterrorism challenge (Faiola and Mekhennet). Germany had 10 minors involved in plots of terrorism in 2016; the majority of the minors were born in Germany (Faiola and Mekhennet). German law was changed so that authorities could monitor suspects as young as 14, due to several recent terrorist attacks in Germany by young teens. Some German officials argue that 14 is not young enough, a 12-year old boy from Germany was communicating with
ISIS recruiters and left a homemade bomb near a shopping center that failed to detonate (Faiola and Mekhennet).

Minors are also preferred and sometimes given risky missions because if they are detained, they will get lesser sentences because of their age (Samuel). The head of Germany’s domestic intelligence agency, Hans-Georg Maasen stated, “We are allowed to monitor minors and record them in our databases in exceptional cases only, but they have to be age 14 or over. Normally people do not expect children to commit terrorist attacks. But they can and are. What is really worrying is that people frequently look the other way. They say it’s just a phase of adolescence and surely they will grow out of it. Often parents don’t really know what their children are doing in their rooms” (Faiola and Mekhennet). The continuous stream of teenage recruits to ISIS is also a concern for American authorities that cannot simply detain minors with terror support charges (How to Stop ISIS From Recruiting American Teens). While a minor can be tried as an adult, there is unwillingness among law enforcement to indict minors for material support for terrorism (How to Stop ISIS From Recruiting American Teens). The FBI has attempted to implement “improved” interventions, rather than utilizing traditional sentences with teens (How to Stop ISIS From Recruiting American Teens).

The teen years are a time of important biological, psychosocial, and emotional changes. Logical reasoning skills develop between the age of 11 and 16 (Heinke and Persson 59). Anticipatory reasoning and the contemplation of potential choices are not entirely matured during this time, but continue to progress over the following years (Heinke and Persson 59). Although logical reasoning skills develop around the age of 16, psychosocial abilities that advance judgement and facilitate risk taking continue to develop well into adulthood (Heinke and Persson 59). The characteristics of the adolescent developmental stage are a search for identity, experimentation, risky behavior, the miscalculation of consequences, and heightened impulsivity (Heinke and Persson 59). The natural vulnerabilities of young recruits mark them as ideal for radicalization, and ISIS takes full advantage.

Teens are also targeted because they are easier to brainwash and manipulate. They are manipulated into thinking that God is on their side, and that they are fighting for a moral and admirable cause. Religious leaders and ISIS recruiters, preaching a distorted understanding of Islam have the potential to capture the hearts and minds of misguided youth (Samuel). Because they are naïve and inexperienced, their minds can more easily be influenced and altered. Former Secretary of State John Kerry stated, “Those recruiting for ISIS are not looking for people who are devout and knowledgeable about the tenants of Islam. They are looking for people gullible enough to believe that terrorists enjoy a glamorous lifestyle” (Kaplan).

Theories

The ISIS strategy of mobilizing young recruits has drawn comparisons to Hitler’s Youth program in the 1930’s. Similar to Hitler, ISIS seeks to win the hearts and minds of the next generation. In 1951, Eric Hoffer wrote The True Believe: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements, based on the rise of mass movements including Nazism, fascism, and communism. Hoffer concludes that the ‘true believer’ is a person entirely committed to a cause and willing to die for it. Hoffer claims that frustration, boredom, and marginalization can lead individuals to seek extreme solutions to their problems (Samuel). Hoffer states, "Their innermost craving is for a new life — a rebirth — or, failing this, a chance to acquire new elements of pride, confidence,
hope, a sense of purpose, and worth by an identification with a holy cause” (Hoffer 21). This theory accurately describes the dynamics between ISIS and youth recruitment. Disgruntled youth feeling marginalized, seeking comradery and a purpose in life are the perfect recruits. As Hoffer stated, “For men to plunge headlong into an undertaking of vast change, they must be intensely discontented yet not destitute, and they must have the feeling that by the possession of some potent doctrine, infallible leader or some new technique they have access to a source of irresistible power. They must also have an extravagant conception of the prospects and potentialities of the future. Finally, they must be wholly ignorant of the difficulties involved in their vast undertaking. Experience is a handicap...” (Hoffer 11). Experience is a handicap indeed, which makes brainwashing the youth so appealing to the Islamic State.

Peter Bergen argues that ISIS has adopted the ideology of “Binladenism” to recruit teens, named after Osama Bin Laden. Bidl adenism is the belief that the world will be vastly improved when a Taliban-style caliphate is established throughout the Muslim World, from Morocco to Indonesia (United States of Jihad 11). Recruits are marketed the idea that evil nations and people are thwarting jihadists from achieving this goal: Israel, the United States, and any Middle Eastern regime that does not follow Taliban-style rule (United States of Jihad 11). Bin Laden preached of a global conspiracy against “true” Islam led by the United States, but encompassing the entire Western world and its allies in the Muslim countries (United States of Jihad 11). Bin Laden envisioned the utopian caliphate of the future to be the result of generations of holy war, while ISIS views it as a modern day strategic imperative, but the ideology is the same (United States of Jihad 11). Similar to many ideologies is the notion that history has a direction and purpose, and the outcome will be perfection and bliss (United States of Jihad 11). For Marxist-Leninism, the objective was a classless society, for Nazism it was the domination of the Aryan race and the Thousand Year Reich (United States of Jihad 11). The people or nations thwarting or frustrating the utopian society that is craved are perceived to be evil; this belief explains Stalin’s purges murdering millions of counter-revolutionaries and Hitler’s Holocaust (United States of Jihad 11).

The Use of Internet and Social Media

The Internet and social media have been extremely conducive for ISIS luring in teenage recruits. ISIS propaganda is currently more often aimed at the “Millennial generation” and Westerners (Blaker). In the past, terrorist organizations relied on physical meetings for recruitment and training. Physical meetings require time, coordination, and travel. The Internet and social media have bypassed the face-to-face meetings, and connections are made quickly, remotely, and discretely. The role of social media as a ‘radicalization accelerant’ has altered the manner in which terrorists maneuver, and has the upside of unlimited recruiting options (Samuel). ISIS has not only been able to reach a worldwide audience with their propaganda and online savvy, but they have been in contact with teenagers directly via social media platforms (Simcox). The director of the National Counterterrorism Center Matthew Olsen claims, “Importantly, the group also views itself as the now-leader of a global jihadist movement. It turns out timely, high-quality media, and it uses social media to secure a widespread following” (Haq).
ISIS makes no secret of its utilization of teens online, featuring them in propaganda as martyrs and heroes. A 2016 report identified 89 instances of children and teenagers eulogized in ISIS propaganda (Bloom, Horgan, and Winter). Recently, minors have appeared in over 250 ISIS messages, which have depicted youths as executioners of prisoners or “spies” (ABC News). ISIS tries to desensitize teens to violence by exposing them to beheadings aiming to normalize violence (Bloom and Horgan). The exploitation of children and teens is strategic because it provides heightened media attention and allows terrorists to groom more teens by highlighting their peers’ accomplishments (Bloom and Horgan).

In the vast majority of cases involving radicalized Western teens, they often feel isolated from their community or that they have failed to reach their goals (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 18). Violent extremist propaganda can only be effective if it is delivered to individuals that are already feeling marginalized, angry, and isolated in society (Faiola and Mekhennet). If teens are feeling lonely, angry, or ostracized, they can find a community online that cherishes them and gives them attention and comradery. ISIS employs a gradual process of indoctrination, and creates enticing propaganda to lure teens to join their cause.

ISIS uses methods similar to child predators: establishing rapport, gaining trust, catering to emotional needs, and then isolating victims from their community (Bloom and Horgan). ISIS recruiters develop a relationship by making regular contact with prospects on-line, listening to their needs, and becoming a close enough to brainwash them with their ideology (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 19). Eventually ISIS gradually shift’s the teen’s moral viewpoint. If a family member intervenes, ISIS uses blackmail or intimidation to keep contact with their recruits (Bloom and Horgan). “Many of these children are targeted, recruited, indoctrinated, and deployed until they are caught by authorities and have a chance at rehabilitation and, possibly, a normal life” (Bloom and Horgan).

American recruits are involved in a variety of extremist social media sites, from open communication apps like Twitter and Facebook, to more anonymous messaging forums such as the dark web and Telegram (ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa 21). In 2015, National Security Council staffer Hillary Mann Leverett claimed that there were 90,000 pro-ISIS posts on social media (Blaker 1). Twitter has been actively revoking ISIS accounts that spread their views and encourage violence since 2014. As a result, the CEO of Twitter received death threats from ISIS (Blaker 2). Facebook and Twitter were disparaged for permitting terrorists to communicate on their sites; they are now receiving high accolades for their determination to thwart ISIS content (Blaker 2).

Teens are “headhunted” by ISIS after searching radical websites online. ISIS recruiters follow a structured path in recruiting American teens. ISIS begins by monitoring followers on social media sites, such as Facebook or Twitter, after a follower “re-tweets” or a “likes” an ISIS message, they reach out to them to talk one on one (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 19). When they find promising recruits, they will communicate with them using direct messaging to weed out “spies” (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 19). Then the recruiters move to secure sites and encrypted apps so that law enforcement cannot track them while they lure in recruits (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 19). Director of the FBI, James Comey compared ISIS recruiters to “a devil on your shoulder all day long saying ‘Kill, kill, kill’” (Committee on Homeland Security House of Representatives 19).
This has prompted the popularity of Telegram. Telegram is currently the overwhelmingly preferred social media outlet for ISIS (Warrick). Telegram uses encryption that makes more difficult for law enforcement to detect and obstruct terrorists’ plans (Warrick). Telegram also introduced a new version to make it easier to spread large files, private messages, and videos (Warrick). Telegram’s encryption capabilities have been described as “military grade”, and it is very challenging to crack the encryption (Warrick). Telegram also has a feature that makes private messages vanish after they are read (Warrick). By using Telegram, teens can anonymously connect with professionals and use this social media tool to plan acts of terrorism (Warrick). ISIS is two steps ahead of many intelligence agencies in terms of cyber communications (Warrick). As FBI director James Comey stated, “We have made it so hard for people to get into this country, bad guys, but they can enter as a photon and radicalize someone in Wichita, Kansas” (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 11).

The dissemination of ISIS propaganda online and ISIS’ social media has been the major catalyst for the Islamic State’s unparalleled success with teens (Simcox). The variety of social media sites, their popularity with young Americans, and the technological savvy of teenagers have all benefitted the Islamic State’s recruiting efforts (Simcox). ISIS has not only been able to spread its message globally, but they have been able to contact teens directly online and through social media. Consequently, ISIS can simply use messaging apps to encourage teenagers to plot attacks in the West. These plots directed by the Islamic State are described as via “remote control” (Simcox). In the foreword of ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa, the president and chief executive of the Woodrow Wilson Center Jane Harman explained, “The new radicalization crosses borders. Loners don’t have to leave their basements to find extremists messages. Some radical Islamists coordinate complex attacks using PlayStations, while some hatch plots without ever contacting a known terrorist.”

Crowd Sourcing Jihad

When ISIS first gained significant ground in 2014, they concentrated almost entirely on building the caliphate, and inspired Western followers to join them. As Turkey and other nations try to thwart the stream of foreign fighters to Iraq and Syria, the path for Western recruits has become more difficult. In 2015, ISIS shifted their strategy, attacking Western targets outside of Iraq and Syria (Jihadist Terrorism 15 years after 9/11: A Threat Assessment 13). The Islamic State claimed responsibility for downing a Russian airline jet in 2015. Two weeks later, ISIS extremists attacked various locations in Paris. As ISIS currently loses ground in the battlefields of Iraq and Syria, they are aggressively recruiting teens in the West.

As the caliphate in Iraq and Syria decreases in size, so does the appeal for the “foreign fighters” from Western countries (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 18). Approximately 2,000 ISIS fighters are killed a month (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 18). The Islamic State is finding it harder to replenish its rank, which explains the increase of children used as suicide bombers in the caliphate. In April 2016, the Pentagon said that the number of foreign fighters dropped from 1,500 a month two years prior to 200 in 2016 (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 18). The flow of Americans joining ISIS in Syria has slowed considerably from 2014 to 2016, from an average of 6 to one per month (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 18).
In the last two years, “lone wolf” attacks inspired or directed by ISIS has emerged as the new wave of terrorism. Europe and the United States saw almost twice as many lone wolf attacks from 2015-2016 than from 2011-2014 (Byman). The surge in lone-wolf plots has been motivated by ISIS’ encouragement of the scheme (Byman). In 2016, an ISIS leader asserted “the smallest action that you do in the heart of the West is dearer to us than the largest action by us and more effective and more damaging” (Byman). ISIS shifted their strategy because a U.S. led coalition shrunk their caliphate and thwarted their ability to carry out largescale attacks, since lone wolf attacks can provide small triumphs to motivate new recruits and boost morale (Byman). Many recent assailants were not longtime fanatics to extremist ideology; instead they are people searching for meaning in their lives (Byman). The Internet and social media have rapidly increased the ease and capability of these attacks, and provided an outlet to misfits who may not have acted on their nebulous whims (Byman). ISIS recruiters can give instructions to teens over a secure app to build a bomb, and within days an attack can occur (Byman). Lone wolves are generally cheap, untrained, and do not require financing from a terrorist group, thus a terrorist organization gets acknowledgement for the attack for free (Byman). By using untrained teen militants, ISIS risks damaging their reputation with failed plots. Unfortunately, ISIS seems to be ignoring these risks, and accepts and encourages lone wolf attacks committed in its name (Byman). These attacks are frightening because they can strike anywhere. Lone-wolf attacks have increased Islamophobia in the West, thus contributing to a vicious cycle (Byman).

Robin Simcox from the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point gathered data on the Western teenagers and one pre-teen that either planned or executed attacks for ISIS in the West. The data tracks from September 2014 when the Islamic State’s leaders called Western supporters to carry out attacks against “disbelievers”, until the end of December 2016 (Simcox). Although there were calls for attacks in Western countries as early as 2014, the majority of ISIS recruiting messages were trying to lure supporters to the caliphate at that time. The official strategy of attacking Western targets did not mature until 2015. Simcox found that ISIS has been very effective in coaxing teens to plot attacks, and by the end of 2016 there were over 34 plots, either inspired or directed by ISIS in seven Western countries: Australia, Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Simcox). In the majority of cases, the teens that plotted attacks were in direct contact with ISIS operatives (Simcox). The data
indicates that the problem of teenage terrorism is getting worse; there were two plots per month on average in 2016 in Western countries (Simcox). Simcox also states that ISIS’ use of online propaganda and social media networking have had a strong impact on recruiting teens.

Between September 2014 and December 2016, 34 plots or alleged plots were planned by ISIS, either teens directed or inspired by ISIS (Simcox). By the end of December 2016, there were 170 ISIS-linked plots against the West; teen perpetrators represented 20 percent of the overall plots or attacks (Homeland Security Committee 2016). In 2015, there were 7 terrorist plots involving teenager perpetrators in Western countries, in 2016 there was one pre-teen plot and 23 teen plots (Simcox). The mean age was 16.7, the median 17, and the mode 18 (Simcox). According to Simcox’s data, approximately 80 percent of the teens involved in the plots were male, and 20 percent were female. Radicalized teens from both sexes present a security threat, and should be recognized by law enforcement. The plotted attacks were aimed at targets in 7 countries: Australia, Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Simcox). The country most targeted by teens was France, which has faced 11 plots (32 percent of the total), the next most targeted was Australia (8 plots or 24 percent), followed by Germany (6 plots by teens and one plot by a pre-teen or 21 percent), and the United States (5 plots or 15 percent) (Simcox). France had an outbreak of teens involved in plotting or committing terrorist attacks in 2016 (Simcox). According to French officials almost 2,000 teens in France are assessed to be radicalized, with a 121 percent increase between 2015 and 2016 (Simcox). There were 10 plots in France orchestrated by teens in 2016, only one plot in 2015 (Simcox). In Germany, all of the 6 plots planned by teens took place in 2016 (Simcox). Australia and the United States have seen more balanced attacks between 2014 to 2016 (Simcox). In Australia, there were 2 plots in 2014, 3 in 2015, and 3 in 2016 (Simcox). In the United States, there were 3 plots in 2015, and 2 in 2016 (Simcox).

Law enforcement did not have prior intelligence of the scheming of 11 plots (32 percent). In the United States, 40 percent of the plots were carried out and were not thwarted by intelligence (Simcox). Overall, these attacks conducted by teens resulted in two civilian deaths: Curtis Cheng, a civilian police worker in Sydney, Australia in October 2015, and a Catholic priest Jaques Hamel in Normandy, France, in June 2016 (Simcox). These attacks collectively resulted in 28 non-fatally wounded victims (Simcox). Civilians were the most common targets, 50 percent of the plots aimed to kill civilians (Simcox). Of the 5 plots in the United States, 4 plots or (80 percent) targeted civilians (Simcox). In 21 of the 34 plots (61.8 percent), at least one of the teens perpetrators had been in known contact with ISIS militants (Simcox). In 17 plots (50 percent), this contact with the Islamic State occurred only electronically with encrypted messaging platforms such as Telegram (Simcox). In only 4 cases (11.8 percent) was face-to-face interaction between ISIS and the teen operatives utilized (Simcox). Face to face radicalization has become less of a factor than the influence of the Internet and social media to radicalize teens internationally (Simcox).

Of the 34 plots, only 7 cases (20.6 percent) involved teenagers acting independently, without a partner, peer, or the instructions of an ISIS militant (Simcox). In 8 plots (23.5 percent), there were two teens working together (Simcox). Teens tend to participate in plots with peers, as opposed to operating alone (Simcox). Teens are more prone to peer pressure both from adults and their peers (Simcox). Standard teenage concerns such as peer pressure and wanting to please others has been activated by ISIS as recruiting tools (Simcox). An example of this strategy is when an ISIS recruiter used an incident of girls answering the call for brutality to degrade their male peers into action (Simcox). After the arrest of a girl involved in the Paris
train station plot, an ISIS recruiter scolded ISIS’ male supporters via Telegram. According to Simcox, the ISIS recruiter said, “The women, our sisters, went into action…where are the men? You have to understand that if these women went into action, it’s because so few men are doing anything…why are you waiting so long to the point the women are overtaking you in terms of honor?”

There were only two converts to Islam among the perpetrators, one from the United States, and one from Denmark (Simcox). This is surprisingly low, overall 40 percent of ISIS followers in the United States are converts (Homeland Security Committee 2015). There were 5 plots (15 percent) that were conspired by teen refugees, which all took place in 2016 (Simcox). One of these acts of violence was on U.S. soil, Abdul Artan, a Somali refugee wounded 11 people in Ohio (Simcox). The other four attacks were in Germany in 2016 (Simcox). According to Simcox, the relatively high refugee percentages involved in attacks would appear to be at least two-pronged. ISIS operatives have exploited the refugee movement to penetrate Europe, therefore making it easier to prey on youngsters that have moved to a new country (Simcox).

There have been some explanations for the increased terrorist attacks in Europe. Europe has recently seen an unprecedented wave of immigration to Germany and France from the Middle East. Germany has accepted more than a million asylum seekers and refugees (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 19). Europe has not been able to assimilate immigrants as successfully as the United States. Peter Bergen explains, “European countries simply do not have the ideological framework the United States has in the shape of the ‘American Dream’, which has helped to successfully absorb wave after wave of immigration, including Muslim-Americans who are well-integrated into American society” (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 19). In France, many Muslims live in segregated banlieues or neighborhoods outside of large cities, where they are isolated and marginalized. The youth unemployment for Muslims in France has reportedly been as high as 45 percent, and Muslim citizens are less likely to get a job interview than another candidate (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 20).

The amplified threat in France, Germany, and Australia should alarm American law enforcement and intelligence communities. Radicalized teens in Europe are a short plane flight away from American cities, and they have the capabilities to peer recruit American teens internationally through social media. In 2016, France and Germany witnessed an overwhelming amount of attacks orchestrated by teens. American law enforcement should remain vigilant and on high alert; the United States is not immune from a similar epidemic. It does not require an army of teenagers to orchestrate a terrorist attack, it only requires one.

Policy Suggestions

The United States law enforcement agencies need to enlist the community and collaborate with schools to help detect radicalization. Teachers should be trained to notice the signs of radicalization and the proper way to manage and report an at-risk student. Schools should also try to prevent the process of radicalization from occurring in the first place, with an educational approach that teaches critical thinking skills, and respect for human rights and diversity. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue has collaborated with the education community to produce Extreme Dialogue, a critical thinking seminar utilizing short films based on the stories of former extremists and survivors, and an online lesson with guides for teachers to use in the
classroom setting (Havlicek 16). Local community engagement is vital to counter the messages from extremists, and to tip law enforcement of at-risk teens. The United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism also advocates including the community and education programs to counter violent extremism. According to the UN plan, “Education should include teaching respect for human rights and diversity, fostering critical thinking, promoting media and digital literacy, and developing the behavioral and socioeconomically skills that can contribute to peaceful coexistence and tolerance.”

In many European countries, a community network of police officers, social workers, educators, housing officers, health professionals, and community leaders have received training on identifying the warning signs of radicalization (Singer). France introduced a new civics curriculum to counter extremism called “Grand Mobilization of Schools for the Values of the Republic”. French schools are now engaged in a national conversation to prevent violent extremism (Singer). French President Francois Hollande stated that teachers were “in the front line” of the battle against extremist ideology (Singer). The United States department of Defense created an “Education Activity Antiterrorism Awareness” website for students, but there have been greater precautions in U.S. schools for anti-bullying campaigns and other issues than radicalization. The assistant to the president of homeland security and counterterrorism, Lisa Monaco has noted that teachers, mentors, families, and peers are most likely to notice early signs of radicalization. “We need to do more to help communities understand the warning signs and then work together to intervene before an incident can occur” (How to Stop ISIS from Recruiting American Teens). Even though there have been a relatively small number of radicalized teens plotting attacks in the United States and there are arguably more pressing concerns that schools are facing, radicalization is an imminent issue that should not be ignored in schools or communities. One act of terrorism can have detrimental effects both economically and psychologically on communities and the country. ISIS does not need thousands of radicalized teens; they only need a few that are willing to act.

The FBI has noted how ordinary it is for individuals to know that an individual is radicalized yet authorities are never alerted (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 25). FBI analysts have noted that peers are the least likely to volunteer information about radicalization to law enforcement (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 25). Family members are often cognizant of radicalization but they are less likely to alert law enforcement than authority figures, such as military commanders, supervisors, teachers, professors, or religious leaders (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 25). Authority figures that interact with teens on a daily basis are more cognizant of teen’s radical ideologies than plotting an attack (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 25). Strangers are the most likely to report radicalization, which indicates that American law enforcement needs to enlist the community (Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment 25).

The FBI launched a website countering extremism called Don’t Be a Puppet: Pull Back the Curtain on Violent Extremism. The FBI claims that an increasing number of ISIS militants are trying to recruit America’s youth, especially through social media and the Internet (Don’t Be a Puppet: Pull Back the Curtain on Violent Extremism). The purpose of the website is to encourage young Americans to think critically and reject violent extremism. The site claims that by blindly consenting to ISIS ideology, teens are becoming “puppets” of radical militants who want them to plot attacks and kill Americans. The site teaches teens how radical groups try to lure them online and to think critically instead of blindly accepting the views of extremists.
According to the FBI’s website *Don’t Be a Puppet: Pull Back the Curtain on Violent Extremism*, “The FBI encourages community groups, families, and High Schools across the United States to use this site as part of their educational efforts. All Americans are asked to join the FBI in exposing the seductive nature of violent extremist propaganda and offering positive alternatives to violence.” While this is a step in the right direction to counter teen extremism, a website is not enough to enlist the community and schools. There needs to be direct collaboration and communication between law enforcement and schools.

The United States also needs to thwart the ISIS propaganda and social media machine with “micro targeting” to counter the messages for those who are tempted by ISIS (*Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment* 28). Advertisers on the Internet routinely use “micro targeting” for consumers shopping; this technique could be adapted for individuals looking at ISIS propaganda (*Jihadist Terrorism 15 Years After 9/11: A Threat Assessment* 28). There also needs to be increased pressure on social media companies and apps to take down or report any ISIS material to law enforcement agencies. The U.S. is not only fighting a military battle against ISIS, but a battle of ideologies. The United States must amplify the counter-narrative and create a cyber strategy that will drown ISIS out digitally. As Secretary of Defense Martin Dempsey explained to members of Congress, the war against ISIS will not be achieved solely through military victories; their ideology and ability to spread ideas must be thwarted (Merchant).

**Conclusion**

The United States should be prepared for continued domestic attacks by teens. The data suggests that the trend of terrorist plots and attacks orchestrated by teens in Western countries is increasing (Simcox). Radicalized teens of both sexes are a national security threat and the risk has increased since ISIS declared their caliphate (Simcox). The role of social media has been crucial to ISIS recruitment; yet social media is not the sole medium for radicalization. American teens that join ISIS are not a homogenous group; they come from a full spectrum of ethnicities, religious backgrounds, economic statuses, and educational levels. Their reasons for joining ISIS are just as diverse, some dislike U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, some want comradery or a sense of purpose, and others are bored with their comfortable and humdrum life in the U.S. and are seeking adventure. Since there is no standard profile of an ISIS recruit, there is also no all-encompassing solution to diminish ISIS’ allure.
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