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HOMEGROWN  
TERRORISM

by Ally Pregulman and Emily Burke

## Executive Summary

Incidents of “homegrown terrorism”—extremist violence perpetrated by U.S. citizens or legal U.S. residents, and linked to or inspired by al Qaeda’s brand of radical Sunni Islamism—have increased in the aggregate since 9/11.<sup>1</sup> Homegrown extremists, as defined in the CSIS report *A Threat Transformed: Al Qaeda and Associated Movements in 2011*, are “radicalized groups and individuals that are not regularly affiliated with, but draw clear inspiration and occasional guidance from, al Qaeda core or affiliated movements.”<sup>2</sup> A growing number of Muslims—both naturalized citizens and American-born—have communicated with extremists who are linked to al Qaeda and Associated Movements (AQAM), have sought terrorist training, or have attempted to carry out attacks either inside the United States or abroad. While not official members of al Qaeda or its affiliates, these individuals and small groups have been influenced by and have sought to involve themselves in AQAM’s global war against the West.

The Al Qaeda and Associated Movements (AQAM) Futures Project is a joint study undertaken by the CSIS Transnational Threats Project and the CSIS Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Program. The initiative will produce a series of alternative futures regarding the state of AQAM in the year 2025 and generate recommendations to defeat the threat over the long term. Drawing on historical analysis, social science research, expert interviews, and targeted fieldwork, this project will provide to policymakers and strategists a vision beyond the next few years and will consider the trends and shocks that may shape AQAM over the next decade and a half.

This case study is one of several examining the historic evolution and future prospects of al Qaeda and its range of affiliated groups. The purpose of the case studies is to determine the key drivers that have influenced a terrorist group’s trajectory over time. Ultimately, these drivers, in conjunction with additional supporting analysis, will be used to inform projections about the future of al Qaeda and its affiliates.

## Key Judgments

### The Emergence of Homegrown Terrorism from 2001 to the Present

- *The ideological resonance of the al Qaeda stock narrative—that the United States and the West are at war with Islam—has been a major motivator for homegrown terrorists.* Many homegrown extremists, fueled by critiques of U.S. military action in Iraq and Afghanistan, have stated an ideological desire to protect the Muslim community, which they believe is under attack by the West.
- *Potential homegrown terrorists have increasingly relied on the Internet and social networking media for radicalization, recruitment, training, and operational support.* The recent growth of information and communications technology has given homegrown extremists increased access to a wide variety of resources while decreasing the need to travel internationally or interact in person with al Qaeda members.
- *The ability to network through transnational intermediaries—individuals who encourage recruits to cross the line from rhetoric to violent action—has played a significant role in driving homegrown extremism.* These intermediaries, whether directly or indirectly affiliated with al Qaeda-linked terrorist organizations, have assisted a significant number of U.S. citizens and legal residents in their drive to achieve extremist aims. They have played a role in accelerating the radicalization and recruitment process and have also provided access to training and operational support that would otherwise be difficult for homegrown extremists to obtain on their own.

## Narrative

### The Emergence of Homegrown Terrorism

The homegrown terrorist movement is the most diverse of the al Qaeda-affiliated movements. In Europe, many homegrown extremists have historically come from impoverished and socially marginalized communities.<sup>3</sup> However, U.S. extremists have generally been better integrated into U.S. society, have come from a variety of educational

and socioeconomic backgrounds, and have been of various ages and ethnicities. Many homegrown extremists have never committed a prior crime, which aids in their ability to remain undetected by law enforcement authorities. And in contrast to al Qaeda-affiliated organizations that make conscious decisions to operate in cells, homegrown terrorists have been more likely to be self-starters who adopt the al Qaeda narrative on their own, only connecting with an AQAM group after repeated attempts or when approached by an intermediary seeking to facilitate the networking process.<sup>4</sup>

Operationally, these individuals have had varying levels of training and access to financing, have exhibited diverse levels of planning, and have met with varying degrees of success; some attacks have resulted in deaths, while others have been disrupted during the planning stages. Several extremist plots have been thwarted by undercover law enforcement operations. Finally, homegrown extremists' support for AQAM and its mission has manifested itself in several ways, ranging from direct attacks on U.S. targets to participation in AQAM training and operations abroad.

### Homegrown Terrorism Trends

Since 9/11, al Qaeda-inspired homegrown terrorism has become an increasingly prevalent threat to the United States; there were 21 plots or attacks from late 2001 to late 2008.<sup>5</sup> However, there was a significant increase in the average annual number of incidents between May 2009 and October 2011, with 32 attacks or plots linked to homegrown terrorism reported, more than in all the previous years since 9/11 combined.<sup>6</sup> While incidents of homegrown terrorism decreased slightly in 2011 from their peak in 2009 and 2010, such acts continue to occur with disturbing frequency.<sup>7</sup>

As AQAM has sought new means to achieve its goals, it has increasingly leveraged homegrown terrorists. This trend may, in part, be a by-product of successful U.S. counterterrorism operations. Before 9/11, al Qaeda was able to operate with reasonable mobility, organize large training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and plan elaborate attacks. However, amplified counterterrorism pressure has greatly limited al Qaeda's mobility and capacity to launch operations and has forced it to increasingly rely on affiliates and individuals to carry out its plans. AQAM has also utilized homegrown extremists due to their unique famil-

ilarity with and ability to operate in both the United States and abroad, particularly within Muslim communities. Further, AQAM has recognized that attacks do not need operational success to be effective. Even Faisal Shahzad's failed bomb plot was disconcerting to U.S. government officials and citizens, given his ability to assemble explosives and position them in the heart of New York City without being detected.

### Attributes of Homegrown Terrorists

Until recently, legal residents of the United States and U.S. citizens have been able to travel widely, link with terrorist organizations to gain training, and return to the United States—all while attracting less scrutiny than would be likely for traditional AQAM recruits. For instance, David Coleman Headley, a U.S. citizen of Pakistani descent, allegedly traveled throughout the Middle East and Asia as an undercover informant for the U.S. government but also collaborated with the Pakistani terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).<sup>8</sup> As part of his involvement with LeT, Headley received training and conducted surveillance that contributed to the planning of the 2008 Mumbai attacks. He was able to travel freely throughout India and film videos of downtown Mumbai as part of a plot to assist LeT members in formulating the attacks.<sup>9</sup> If they had attempted this surveillance themselves, Headley's Pakistani counterparts would likely have faced increased scrutiny from Indian officials. At the time of his arrest in 2009, Headley was scouting for an allegedly AQAM-approved attack in Denmark, another country where his counterparts would have had more difficulty navigating.

Similarly, Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan-born, Pakistani-raised legal resident of the United States, was able to travel to Pakistan to receive training in the use of weapons and explosives, and was then able to return to the United States without detection. His training enabled him to assemble homemade explosives without further instruction or supervision from al Qaeda. Although he was apprehended before carrying out his planned attack, his status as a legal U.S. resident may have shielded him from increased levels of scrutiny upon his return from Pakistan. He did not arouse the suspicions of U.S. counterterrorism officials until he bought large quantities of hydrogen peroxide-filled beauty ingredients that could be used to create explosives, rented a car, and drove toward New York City days before the 9/11 anniversary.<sup>10</sup> Although recent improvements in

airport screening and increased scrutiny of travelers to countries suspected of links to terrorism may have somewhat hindered the freedom of mobility of extremists like Zazi and Headley, other U.S. citizens and legal residents like them will likely continue to enjoy more freedom of movement than their foreign counterparts.

The cultural and language capabilities of homegrown extremists have been both an advantage for them and a cause for concern for counterterrorism officials. Many of these individuals were born or raised in the United States, and therefore possess multicultural familiarity and language skills that traditional terrorists may lack. Headley was able to navigate both India and Denmark, two extremely different countries, while conducting surveillance for LeT. He even changed his name from Daood Gilani to a more "Western"-sounding name in an effort to evade suspicion.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the "Northern Virginia Five," a group of five students who traveled to Pakistan with the intention of joining the Taliban, were all Americans and had seemingly normal American lifestyles, attending college and following soccer matches. Their arrest in Pakistan after trying to link with terrorist networks, donate money, and join the fight against the United States came as a shock to many of their friends and family members.<sup>12</sup> Even U.S. and Pakistani officials had difficulty viewing the Northern Virginia Five as anything other than students.<sup>13</sup> If they had not been apprehended, they could have potentially reentered the United States and carried out terrorist acts, blending in as part of the community.

Due to perceptions regarding the likely profile of terrorists, homegrown extremists have presented a unique challenge to U.S. intelligence and law enforcement officials. For instance, Colleen LaRose, or "Jihad Jane," was an American convert to Islam. After her conversion, she turned to the Internet to seek out other Muslims and find a way to "do something to somehow help suffering Muslims."<sup>14</sup> She soon connected with extremists and joined a plot to kill Lars Vilks, a Swedish cartoonist whose depictions of Muhammad had enraged Muslims worldwide. The fact that she was Caucasian and a woman made her relatively inconspicuous and allowed her to operate with greater ease within the United States and Europe.<sup>15</sup>

## Analysis

The al Qaeda–inspired homegrown terrorist movement within the United States has remained largely disparate and difficult to define. Although attacks and plots have increased in frequency since September 11, 2001, extremists still tend to act alone or in small groups. While no two occurrences of homegrown extremism have been the same, there are similarities between the various incidents, particularly with regard to what factors motivated and facilitated the plotters. The rise of homegrown extremism in the post-9/11 era can be attributed to the ideological resonance of al Qaeda’s narrative of a war between the West and Islam, the use of information and communication technology, and networking through transnational intermediaries.

### Al Qaeda’s Ideological Resonance with Homegrown Terrorism

Despite variances between the individual plots, the ideological resonance of the al Qaeda stock narrative has been universally evident in each homegrown extremist’s motivations, particularly in their belief that they must protect the Muslim community.<sup>16</sup> AQAM has embraced the power of its messaging of a Western war on Islam and seeks to disseminate it globally. This ideological resonance has often driven the ideology, recruitment, and operational strategies of the decentralized and largely uncoordinated homegrown movement. Further, AQAM appears to have utilized Abu Musab al Suri’s concept of individual terrorism, directing singular initiatives with strategic guidance from key AQAM leaders or intermediaries, in its encouragement of homegrown extremism.<sup>17</sup> And AQAM spokesmen like Adam Gadhan have extolled the actions of homegrown extremists, while encouraging others to follow in their footsteps and take action against the United States and the West.

The al Qaeda narrative has played a substantial role in shaping the ideology of those who have become homegrown terrorists. These individuals have appeared less concerned with some of the original elements of al Qaeda’s message, such as the need to establish Sharia (Islamic law), but they have been increasingly swayed by the narrative of a Western war against Islam.<sup>18</sup> The United States’ military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan has contributed to the resonance of al Qaeda’s ideology, which portrays these interventions as an attack on Muslims.<sup>19</sup> Additionally,

alliances with “apostate” governments (i.e., governments that have abandoned their religion, according to al Qaeda) in the region and kinetic counterterrorism activities have been used to perpetuate extremists’ beliefs that all Muslims are targets of Western aggression and have reinforced the power of al Qaeda’s messaging.<sup>20</sup>

This narrative has been persuasive enough to motivate a small but disturbing number of American citizens and legal residents to take up arms to prevent further perceived assaults on Muslims. For instance, Nidal Malik Hasan, a major in the U.S. Army, initially advocated for Muslim soldiers to be diverted from service in Iraq and Afghanistan so as not to “put them in the position of hurting/killing believers unjustly.”<sup>21</sup> However, his extremist ideology manifested itself violently when he allegedly opened fire in the Soldier Readiness Center in Fort Hood, Texas, killing 12 fellow soldiers and a civilian employee in an attempt to prevent them from fighting in the perceived war against Islam.<sup>22</sup> Some officials believe that the teachings of Anwar al-Awlaki, a prominent English-language propagandist for al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula who has preached in U.S. mosques and whose teachings are accessible on the Internet, were what pushed Hasan toward violent action.<sup>23</sup>

The al Qaeda narrative has also resonated with other groups and individuals, including the “Minnesota Somalis.” This group of young men from the Somali diaspora community in Minneapolis were incensed by the 2006 Ethiopian invasion of Somalia, perceiving it not only as a threat to their homeland but also as an assault on the Muslim world from a Christian nation backed by the West.<sup>24</sup> Many of these Somalis frequented extremist Web sites and watched Awlaki’s videos, seeking ways to show their frustration over the Ethiopian invasion.<sup>25</sup> Roughly 20 of these American citizens, who ranged from undereducated and underemployed youths to pre-med and engineering students, eventually traveled to Somalia to join al Qaeda–affiliated al Shabaab between 2007 and 2008, and some eventually became suicide bombers. The al Qaeda ideology resonated with the preexisting dissatisfaction of the Somali community and gave these individuals a concrete, radical outlet for expressing their discontent over the Ethiopian invasion.

The al Qaeda stock narrative has been a powerful recruiting tool, appealing to potential extremists of various ethnicities, ages, and professions. The message resonated

with Faisal Shahzad, a Pakistani who moved to the United States with a student visa. In 2007, Shahzad was incensed by the siege of the Red Mosque in Pakistan, where over 100 people were killed when the Pakistani army launched a raid against militants garrisoned inside.<sup>26</sup> Shahzad, who had prayed at the Red Mosque, was attracted to postings on militant Web sites claiming that the corrupt Pakistani government had attacked in order to please the United States.<sup>27</sup> As a result, he sought out and received explosives training from members of Tehrik-i-Taliban in Pakistan, along with money to buy a car and explosives. Then, in May 2010, he attempted to detonate a car bomb in Times Square in an attempt to punish the United States for the Red Mosque attack, but he was unsuccessful.<sup>28</sup> The al Qaeda narrative has also resonated with converts such as Colleen LaRose, who posted on YouTube that she was desperate to mitigate the suffering of Muslims.<sup>29</sup> Seeking out information about Islam on the Internet, she gradually began to access more extremist content and YouTube videos, which contributed to her radicalization.<sup>30</sup> Her identification with al Qaeda's ideology grew, eventually leading her to join a group planning attacks against Lars Vilks, the Swedish cartoonist who drew controversial caricatures of Mohammad.

Similarly, al Qaeda's ideology is a powerful driver of operational planning for homegrown extremists, proving persuasive enough to inspire attacks not only on military targets (e.g., recruiting stations) but also against civilians. Many recruits have apparently accepted al Qaeda's message that strikes against Western civilians are legitimate and have planned their operations to reflect this. Thus, Najibullah Zazi could have gone abroad to fight in Iraq, Afghanistan, or even Somalia, but the al Qaeda narrative inspired him to instead stay in the United States and attempt to detonate a bomb in the New York subway system in hopes of killing civilians. The al Qaeda message has strongly resonated with the frustrations and extremist viewpoints of a wide range of disparate individuals and has connected them in a common cause.<sup>31</sup>

## The Use of Information and Communication Technology

Information and communication technology (ICT) has played an essential role in disseminating al Qaeda's radical ideology and also serving to help coordinate, facilitate, and provide support for would-be terrorists' plans. Social net-

working media and the Internet have replaced many of the physical networks that were previously integral to radicalization and plot development. YouTube, Skype, email interfaces, blogs, message boards, and other social networking Web sites have become invaluable tools and resources to those seeking out information on joining or supporting terrorist groups or wishing to attack the United States. The Internet has made terrorist acts easier for individuals to plan and carry out without significant external support. Because it can be accessed from almost any location, it allows extremists to prepare for their attacks without making themselves significantly vulnerable to detection.

Whereas would-be extremists once had to physically attend an extremist mosque or meeting to be exposed to radical rhetoric, al Qaeda-inspired sermons and propaganda are now widely available on the Internet, including on hundreds of English-language Web sites. Elements of AQAM, particularly al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), have increasingly gained new recruits by reaching out to those who cannot read or speak Arabic through English-speaking propagandists, who have utilized the Internet to great effect. One of the most influential of these spokesmen was the cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, who was born in New Mexico and fled to Yemen in 2002. He gained prominence due to his easily accessible English-language speeches and his activity on social networking sites. Numerous homegrown extremists—including Nidal Malik Hasan, as mentioned above—studied Awlaki's teachings and Internet postings before planning and carrying out their attacks.

Another English-language spokesman for AQAM is Adam Gadahn, or Azzam al-Amriki, who converted to Islam at the age of 17, became radicalized in a U.S. mosque, and moved to Pakistan to join al Qaeda. Since the death of Awlaki, he has become one of AQAM's key English-language propagandists and recently released a new video urging Western Muslims to stockpile weapons and target "major institutions and public figures."<sup>32</sup> Another prominent English-language propagandist is Omar Hammami, a U.S. citizen of Syrian descent who gradually embraced radical Islam and eventually moved to Somalia to join al Shabaab. Hammami, who is also known as Abu Mansoor al-Amriki, is proficient in both English and Arabic, and thus al Shabaab has featured him in numerous propaganda videos and even rap videos, including "Send Me a Cruise (Missile)" and "Make Jihad with Me," in addition to involv-

ing him in planning and fighting.<sup>33</sup> Many al Qaeda affiliates possess media wings that have utilized ICT to disseminate recruitment videos and online magazines in the hope of radicalizing and recruiting new homegrown extremists. As Sahab, al Qaeda's media branch, has released propaganda videos in both English and Arabic, while AQAP has produced the English-language online magazine *Inspire*, which has featured articles such as "Know That Jihad Is Your Duty" and "Q&A on Targeting Non-Muslim Civilians and Yemeni Soldiers." However, with the recent deaths of Awlaki and Samir Khan, the editors of *Inspire*, the magazine's future is unclear.

ICT has driven recruitment by providing decentralized and unregulated forums where like-minded individuals can connect. Many potential recruits have been drawn to the Internet in their search to reinforce their personal discontent, network with like-minded individuals, and find an outlet for their anger and frustrations.<sup>34</sup> And once they are on the Internet, homegrown extremists have been able to connect with AQAM recruiters. Thus, Colleen LaRose's recruiter reached out to her through YouTube after viewing her radical comments on a number of videos. Similarly, one of the members of the Northern Virginia Five, Ahmed Abdullah Minni, originally connected with a recruiter on YouTube after he had posted comments on Awlaki's videos.<sup>35</sup> They then corresponded using a joint email account.<sup>36</sup> Mohamed Osman Mohamud, the Portland bomber, also attempted to correspond with an AQAM recruiter through email, but he reportedly failed to enter the correct address, which gave undercover law enforcement officials an opportunity to contact him instead.<sup>37</sup> In addition to facilitating networking with AQAM recruiters and intermediaries, ICT could be used to network directly with other extremists. For example, Farooque Ahmed, a Pakistani naturalized U.S. citizen who planned attacks on multiple Metrorail stations in Washington, used ICT in an attempt to network with individuals he believed were members of AQAM but were in fact undercover law enforcement agents.<sup>38</sup>

Homegrown extremists have also used ICT for operational planning and support. Mohamed Osman Mohamud used the Internet to connect with terrorist networks, conduct research on targets, and plan his attack. After posting articles promoting AQAM in the English-language online magazine *Jihad Recollections*, he networked with terrorist

organizations but ultimately connected with undercover FBI agents posing as terrorists.<sup>39</sup> Using Google Street View, he was able to conduct virtual surveillance of locations to park his truck bomb and map routes in and out of Portland.<sup>40</sup> ICT also helped Faisal Shahzad, the Times Square car bomber, plan his operation; he used a live video feed of Times Square available on the Internet to determine the best time of day for his attack by tracking pedestrian movements and traffic in the area.<sup>41</sup> Beyond conducting reconnaissance, ICT offers a variety of platforms that could enhance operations.

ICT's continued evolution may prove useful for the "virtual training" of homegrown extremists in some tasks, but its absolute utility as a replacement for in-person training remains in question. In the past, ICT has been used to connect individuals with traditional training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Zazi and Shahzad received training abroad, while the Northern Virginia Five, Mohamud, and Ahmed either attempted or planned to travel abroad for training; all these individuals connected or attempted to connect to these resources through ICT. However, as international travel to training grounds in Pakistan and elsewhere becomes increasingly difficult, ICT may allow extremists to receive basic training through social networking media connections, especially as technology advances. AQAM has recognized the importance of ICT and has attempted to exploit it for training purposes. *Inspire* magazine has provided instructions on topics such as "How to Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom" and how to clean AK-47s, in addition to more traditional propaganda pieces. Homegrown extremists have also contributed to the online dialogue on training; Mohamed Osman Mohamed wrote articles for *Jihad Recollections* on such topics as physical preparations for acts of extremism and even submitted an article to *Inspire*.<sup>42</sup>

Although ICT may enable extremists to supplement their knowledge of basic training and how to maintain their weapons, it is unclear how useful ICT may be as a training tool for advanced subjects such as assembling complex explosives, due to the inherent difficulty of such tasks. Ultimately, AQAM has professed interest in using ICT for new initiatives and has encouraged its use for virtual training, but its true value as a replacement for actual training camps remains unclear. What is certain is that

extremists will continue to exploit ICT to enhance their tactical and operational acumen.

## The Use of Networking

Networking with transnational intermediaries has further driven homegrown extremism within the United States by increasing the movement's exposure and connectedness to AQAM and accelerating would-be terrorists' radicalization processes. A number of these intermediaries, who often take on the role of facilitators, have inspired or mobilized individuals and have provided the necessary guidance to radicalize their ideology or improve their capabilities. Many intermediaries have benefited from English-language proficiency and an American upbringing, allowing them to seamlessly navigate the worlds of both the United States and AQAM. Transnational intermediaries have been an integral part of the networking and radicalization process because they have been able to directly communicate ideology to extremists, accelerating their radicalization process. They have also provided credibility to enable would-be terrorists to access recruitment opportunities, hands-on training, and operational support.

Networking through intermediaries has aided potential recruits by providing connections to training resources overseas and directing their motivation toward attacking the United States. Zazi was identified as a potential recruit by Adnan el-Shukrijumah, a Saudi-born, naturalized U.S. citizen. Although Zazi had traveled to Afghanistan with the intent to fight American soldiers, he claimed that Shukrijumah had convinced him to return to the United States and "strike there instead."<sup>43</sup> Shukrijumah then likely facilitated Zazi's travel to Pakistan and admission to an AQAM training camp, where he received explosives training before returning to the United States.<sup>44</sup> Like Zazi, a number of other American citizens and residents were given specialized training and then encouraged to return to the United States to carry out attacks. The Northern Virginia Five, for example, were in contact with an AQAM-affiliated intermediary, who promised to link them with al Qaeda in Pakistan upon their arrival. If the Northern Virginia Five had been successful in receiving training in Pakistan and had returned to the United States, they might have proven lethal. Intermediaries have been the linchpins in identifying such useful recruits, have provided credibility to enable these recruits to access training and other

resources abroad, and have aided in motivating the recruits to attack in the United States.

Many intermediaries have acted as "spotters" by identifying and assisting individuals who have already been radicalized.<sup>45</sup> Thus, after Colleen LaRose expressed a desire to become a martyr for the Muslim cause, she was linked to a larger extremist network by a conspirator who saw the advantages of her appearance and American citizenship.<sup>46</sup> LaRose initially expressed her interest in extremism through the use of ICT, but her connection with an intermediary ultimately enabled her to directly participate in an active plot. Intermediaries have recruited extremists both through ICT and in person in at-risk communities. For instance, the Minnesota Somalis lived in a diaspora community targeted for recruitment by al Shabaab and were promised the "experience of true brotherhood" if they joined.<sup>47</sup> Al Shabaab used some Minnesota mosques as recruitment centers to target large groups of recruits.<sup>48</sup> Many homegrown extremists already have grievances against the United States; the intermediaries work to turn their anger and resentment into violent actions by legitimizing their perception of Western injustices and by incorporating them into the global network of like-minded individuals.

## The Future of Homegrown Terrorism

On the basis of current trends, in the coming years the homegrown movement will likely grow in size and scope while experiencing an overall shift in its composition. Despite a weakened AQAM leadership, which will be diminished as a result of U.S. counterterrorism efforts, the al Qaeda ideology will continue to resonate with and inspire individuals to take action in the United States and throughout the West. However, due to increased U.S. and global efforts to combat terrorism, homegrown extremists will likely curtail their attempts to seek out physical training and will increasingly use ICT to both network and train. Individuals will remain largely unincorporated from AQAM, avoiding contact until they unite, if at all, to carry out joint attacks. Further, the overall sophistication of attacks will probably decrease as homegrown extremists increasingly attack with firearms rather than attempt to carry out more elaborate plots. Ultimately, the homegrown movement will remain a threat in 2025, potentially posing

a greater danger to the United States and the West than any other element of AQAM.

### Support and Encouragement from AQAM

As AQAM continues to be targeted by global counterterrorism efforts, its encouragement of individual acts of terrorism will likely increase. Individual terrorism appears to be an increasingly important component of AQAM's strategy, given that such attacks rely less on established organizations for coordination or motivation. Thus, in the January 2011 issue of AQAP's *Inspire* magazine, individual terrorism was lauded as "fundamental for exhausting the enemy and causing him to collapse and withdraw."<sup>49</sup> Propagandists such as Gadhan and Hammami will likely continue to disseminate videos and speeches on the Internet to encourage their "brothers in Islam" to launch individual acts of terrorism against the United States. U.S. kinetic actions have eliminated key leaders of AQAM, including the editors of *Inspire*, and may discourage those seeking to replace them. However, ICT contributes to the self-sustaining nature of the movement; the ideology of past AQAM members and clerics remains available on the Internet and will probably continue to spread and resonate with the homegrown extremist movement.<sup>50</sup>

### Training

As the United States increasingly scrutinizes its citizens' and legal residents' international travel to certain regions, training camps in traditional geographic safe havens may grow less accessible to new terrorists, forcing them to seek out alternate training methods. Although ICT provides a wealth of easily accessible knowledge for the homegrown movement, bomb-making requires specialized skills and an attention to detail that may be difficult to impart over the Internet. Thus, despite his hands-on training in Pakistan, Faisal Shahzad still lacked the technical expertise to assemble a working bomb.<sup>51</sup> Further, training via the Internet does not allow for extensive weapons testing. To avoid detection by law enforcement, extremists might not test their weapons before they attack, risking failure.

The disparate nature of the homegrown terrorist movement also impedes information sharing among extremists. A lack of advanced training could drive future homegrown extremists further toward unsophisticated attacks using firearms or other simple weapons. In the future, home-

grown individuals who use less sophisticated weapons may be more difficult to track due to the relative ease of procuring firearms in the United States. Extremists with a dearth of skills may also reach out to others to fill their knowledge gaps, which could provide inroads for counterterrorism officials. Law enforcement officers have successfully infiltrated plots by posing as AQAM operatives seeking to become the partners of unskilled individuals.

### Extremists' Adaptability

Although the nature of the homegrown movement has prevented extremists from directly learning from their peers, they will continue to glean knowledge from other attempted and successful terrorist attacks. Terrorists operating independently do not have a network of skilled operatives upon which to rely. However, the 24-hour news cycle and the growth of social networking media have led to comprehensive, instantaneous access to information. Thus a homegrown operative living in the United States and planning an attack can very easily gain knowledge from his predecessors. Faisal Shahzad's car bomb provides a lesson in the complexity of building homemade explosives, while Nidal Malik Hasan's attack on Fort Hood proves that detailed advanced planning and complex weapons are not required to have a significant impact. AQAM is already changing its tactics to more fully support the homegrown movement;<sup>52</sup> Adam Gadhan recently encouraged homegrown extremists to follow Hasan's footsteps by emphasizing speed and effectiveness over spectacle to evade detection. As homegrown extremists adapt to the lessons they have learned, the movement's plots will likely become less sophisticated and more focused on efficiency.

### Support for Acts of Terrorism

Individuals who want to participate in the homegrown terrorist movement are not limited to attempting violent attacks but could instead contribute financially or provide technical support to like-minded individuals. For instance, rather than taking up arms himself, Samir Khan contributed to AQAP by publishing *Inspire* magazine and waging a media war against the United States, and thus he reached out to homegrown extremists and inspired them to take action. Extremists who lack the capacity to attack or do not want to carry out attacks themselves may nonetheless support operations against the United States and throughout the West by other means. These individuals could pro-

vide a variety of resources beyond providing inspiration for other would-be terrorists, such as funding, physical resources, intelligence, and technical expertise. Extremists serving in these kinds of support functions may not incur suspicion; only when their actions are linked to other extremists does the real threat become apparent. ICT and decentralized operations could serve as de facto networks for extremists that would improve the success rate of their plots. This diffuse aspect of the movement could be one of its most dangerous traits, because it enables individuals to support homegrown extremists without ever physically interacting with them, which makes these support providers more difficult for law enforcement to detect.

## Notes

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