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# The Islamic State's Acolytes and the Challenges They Pose to U.S. Law Enforcement: In Brief

name redacted

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## Broad Challenges for Federal Law Enforcement

Analysis of U.S. counterterrorism investigations since September 11, 2001 (9/11), suggests that the Islamic State (IS)<sup>1</sup> and its acolytes may present broad challenges for domestic law enforcement. These challenges involve understanding and responding to a variety of terrorist actors who arguably can be sorted into five categories:

### Foreign Fighters

For the purposes of this report, foreign fighters are U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, or aliens who radicalized in the United States and plotted to or traveled abroad to join a foreign terrorist group.

- **The Departed**—Americans, often described as foreign fighters, who plan to leave or have left the United States to fight for the Islamic State.<sup>2</sup> This group includes suspects scheming to travel but who are caught before they arrive in IS territory.
- **The Returned**—American foreign fighters who trained with or fought in the ranks of the Islamic State and come back to the United States, where they can potentially plan and execute attacks at home.<sup>3</sup>
- **The Inspired**—Americans lured—in part—by IS propaganda to participate in terrorist plots within the United States.
- **The Others**—Foreign IS adherents who radicalize in and originate from places outside of the United States or non-American foreign fighters active in the ranks of the Islamic State. These persons could try to enter the United States when done fighting abroad.<sup>4</sup>

In this conceptualization, the departed, the returned, the inspired, and the others are known or suspected by law enforcement as terrorists. This suggests an additional category:

- **The Lost**—Unknown Americans who fight in the ranks of the Islamic State but do not plot terrorist attacks against the United States. Such individuals may come home after fighting abroad and remain unknown to U.S. law enforcement. Additionally, some American IS fighters will never book a trip back to the United States. (The post 9/11 record of U.S. counterterrorism investigations suggests this prospect. None of the Americans who have fought for al-Shabaab, a terrorist group based in Somalia, have come home to plot attacks.) Finally, some American IS supporters will perish abroad.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The group has also been known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS), the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and Daesh, among other names. This group has been involved in the Syrian civil war. For more information see CRS Report RL33487, *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response*, coordinated by (name redacted).

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this report, “Americans” means U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, or aliens residing in the United States.

<sup>3</sup> This group does not include people who left the United States but failed to join up with a terrorist group. Such individuals are among “the departed.”

<sup>4</sup> See also CRS Report R44003, *European Fighters in Syria and Iraq: Assessments, Responses, and Issues for the United States*, coordinated by (name redacted).

<sup>5</sup> “Sources say second American killed fighting with ISIS in Syria identified as Abdirahmaan Muhumed,” *FOX News*, August 28, 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2014/08/28/us-looking-into-report-2nd-american-killed-fighting-with-isis-in-syria/>.

## Confronting the Challenges

There is no exact, official, and publicly available count of Americans who have been drawn to the Islamic State. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has *estimated* that “upwards of 200 Americans have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria to participate in the conflict.”<sup>6</sup> The State Department has suggested that the Islamic State has attracted more than 22,000 foreign fighters from more than 100 countries.<sup>7</sup>

In a general sense, it appears that the current challenges posed by the Islamic State largely require U.S. law enforcement to *identify* individuals who pose a danger as terrorists and *preempt* their efforts to do harm.<sup>8</sup> All of this draws on resources, strategies, and programs developed in response to 9/11. Beyond these established programs, federal officials have made general public statements suggesting additional law enforcement efforts specifically targeting the Islamic State.

*The following discussion is not intended as an exhaustive analysis of federal law enforcement counterterrorism efforts in the homeland. It is meant to broadly inform policy makers on such activity.*

## Identifying Potential Terrorists—Going after “the Lost”

In 2014, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) Director noted that the U.S. government was “working very hard” especially with European partners to identify, track, and disrupt the violent activities of foreign fighters involved in the Syrian conflict.<sup>9</sup> For the United States, identifying such individuals involves the country’s watchlisting regimen. The regimen effectively attempts to shrink the “the lost” category described above.

Federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies (such as NCTC and the FBI) share information about people they identify as known or suspected terrorists. A result of this effort is a single federal consolidated database of known or suspected terrorists maintained by the FBI-led Terrorist Screening Center—the Terrorist Screening Database (TSDB).<sup>10</sup> (The subjects of some

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<sup>6</sup> Presumably, this estimate includes people who intended to join groups other than the Islamic State; Michael B. Steinbach, Assistant Director, Counterterrorism Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, written statement for a House Committee on Homeland Security hearing, “Terrorism Gone Viral: The Attack in Garland, Texas and Beyond,” June 2, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Background Briefing on Iraq by Senior State Department Official, Washington, DC, May 20, 2015. For more information on the Islamic State and U.S. foreign policy, see CRS Report R43612, *The “Islamic State” Crisis and U.S. Policy*, by (name redacted) et al.

<sup>8</sup> In other instances, such as the recent murders of Steven Sotloff and James Foley, the FBI and additional federal agencies play more reactive roles, gathering intelligence and investigating after crimes have been committed to bring the perpetrators to justice.

<sup>9</sup> Brookings Institution, “A National Counterterrorism Center Threat Assessment of ISIL and Al Qaeda in Iraq, Syria, and Beyond,” “Proceedings,” September 3, 2014, [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2014/09/03-national-counterterrorism-center-threat-assessment-isil-al-qaeda-iraq-syria-beyond/20140903\\_isil\\_syria\\_transcript.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2014/09/03-national-counterterrorism-center-threat-assessment-isil-al-qaeda-iraq-syria-beyond/20140903_isil_syria_transcript.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> For more information see Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, Audit Division, *Audit of the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Management of Terrorist Watchlist Nominations*, Report 14-16, (March 2014), pp. 1-10. The Terrorist Screening Database is also known as the consolidated Terrorist Watchlist. NCTC “maintains the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment which is the U.S. Government’s classified central and shared repository for all known or suspected international terrorists and their networks of contacts and support. Certain identities from the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment are provided to the Terrorist Screening Center for inclusion in the Terrorist (continued...)”

FBI terrorism investigations<sup>11</sup> are included in the TSDB.) The federal government's terrorist watchlisting process plays a key role in tracking people suspected of having ties to IS, because it supports "the ability of front line screening agencies to positively identify known or suspected terrorists trying to obtain visas, enter the country, board aircraft, or engage in other activity."<sup>12</sup> Information from the TSDB is used by "agencies and officials who are authorized to conduct terrorist screening in the course of their official duties." The five "major" federal agencies that use information from the TSDB to screen for terrorists are the Department of State, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), the FBI, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and the Department of Defense (DOD).<sup>13</sup>

## Preempting Terrorists

Preemption of terrorist activity by U.S. law enforcement can be broadly described in terms of *interdiction* (stopping a suspected terrorist from entering the United States, for example), law enforcement *investigation*, and government activities aimed at *keeping radicalized individuals from morphing into terrorists*. Of course, much of this work is predicated on identifying dangerous actors.

## Interdiction

As suggested above, screening processes are crucial to stopping terrorists—interdicting them—before they can harm the homeland. Interdiction conceivably involves at least two wide categories of IS acolytes who may intend to travel to the United States—"the returned" and "the others."

### "The Returned"

As mentioned above, within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components such as CBP and the TSA draw on the TSDB for information regarding known or suspected terrorists, including any Americans entered into the TSDB for joining the Islamic State. For example, battle-hardened American IS members who choose to *return* to the United States run the risk of being spotted at U.S. borders by CBP officials who routinely test the identities of travelers against information drawn from the TSDB.

CBP, charged with the mission of preventing terrorists and their weapons from entering the United States, has described its efforts as intelligence-driven and layered, geared toward mitigating the risk posed by travelers destined for the United States.<sup>14</sup> As this suggests, the agency

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Screening Database." See <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/nsb/tsc/terrorist-screening-center-frequently-asked-questions>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.ise.gov/terrorist-watchlist>.

<sup>13</sup> The Department of State's consular officers uses information from the TSDB for passport and visa screening. TSA draws on the TSDB for aviation security screening. The FBI's National Crime and Information Center uses TSDB material for domestic law enforcement screening. CBP draws on it for border and port of entry screening, and the Department of Defense for base access screening. See <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/nsb/tsc/terrorist-screening-center-frequently-asked-questions>.

<sup>14</sup> In 2012, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) described commercial air travel as "the primary target of terrorist (continued...)"

is at the forefront in identifying Americans who fought with the Islamic State attempting to come home—“*the returned*.” CBP “detect[s], assess[es] and, if necessary, mitigate[s] the risk posed by travelers throughout the international travel continuum. CBP and its partners work to address risk at each stage in the process: (1) the time of application to travel; (2) ticket purchase or reservation; (3) check in at a foreign airport; and (4) arrival in the United States.”<sup>15</sup> Additionally, DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson and other DHS officials have broadly alluded to U.S. efforts to coordinate with allies on foreign fighters.<sup>16</sup> DHS has expanded its liaison with international officials regarding foreign fighters involved in conflict in Syria and Iraq.<sup>17</sup>

### *“The Others” ... The Ones Who Require Visas and ...*

The State Department and DHS play important roles in visa security. These feature prominently in the effort to identify IS fighters not from the United States who try to get U.S. visas—“*the others*.”<sup>18</sup> For example, the State Department Bureau of Consular Affairs is responsible for issuing visas and uses a number of tools to conduct national security and public safety reviews of visa applicants. One tool, implemented in partnership with NCTC, is dubbed “Kingfisher Expansion” (KFE) and began operations in June 2013.

KFE examines 100 percent of the approximately 11 million visa applicants each year to identify any connections to terrorism by comparing applicant data to the classified data holdings [of NCTC].... KFE is an interagency program with a secure on-line vetting platform that allows FBI, DHS, and the Terrorist Screening Center to participate in the applicant reviews. This allows for a more comprehensive and coordinated response back to State Department.<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), an agency within DHS, operates the department’s Visa Security Program. The program is responsible for stopping terrorists and criminals who may try to use the legal visa process to enter the United States. ICE agents are stationed at 20 Visa Security Units in foreign countries.<sup>20</sup> ICE notes that such visa security efforts

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organizations seeking to attack the homeland or move operatives into the United States.” See Kevin McAleenan, then Assistant Commissioner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Office of Field Operations, written statement for a House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security hearing, “Eleven Years Later: Preventing Terrorists from Coming to America,” September 11, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. For more information on CBP’s efforts see CRS Report R43356, *Border Security: Immigration Inspections at Ports of Entry*, by (name redacted). For issues related to visa issuance, see CRS Report R41104, *Immigration Visa Issuances and Grounds for Exclusion: Policy and Trends*, by (name redacted).

<sup>16</sup> The press release discussed the United Kingdom’s decision to raise its threat level from “substantial” to “severe” because of developments in Syria and Iraq. See Department of Homeland Security, “Statement by Secretary Johnson on the United Kingdom’s Decision to Raise Their Threat Level,” press release, August 29, 2014, <http://www.dhs.gov/news/2014/08/29/statement-secretary-johnson-united-kingdom%E2%80%99s-decision-raise-their-threat-level>.

<sup>17</sup> Francis X. Taylor, Under Secretary, Office of Intelligence and Analysis, Department of Homeland Security, written statement for a House Committee on Homeland Security hearing, “Terrorism Gone Viral: The Attack in Garland, Texas and Beyond,” June 2, 2015. Hereinafter: Taylor, written statement.

<sup>18</sup> For more on this, see CRS Report R43589, *Immigration: Visa Security Policies*, by (name redacted).

<sup>19</sup> Matthew G. Olsen, Director, National Counterterrorism Center, written statement, for a Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs hearing, “The Homeland Threat Landscape and U.S. Response,” November 14, 2013. The FBI-led Terrorist Screening Center maintains the TSDB.

<sup>20</sup> The program is located in U.S. embassies and consulates. According to DHS, Visa Security Units *screen* and *vet* visa applicants. Agents in the units *screen* visa applicants against State Department and DHS data systems. These include (continued...)

include examining visa applications for fraud, initiating investigations, coordinating with law enforcement partners, and providing law enforcement training and advice to Department of State officials.<sup>21</sup>

### *. . . Those Who Don't*

What about IS fighters from countries where their citizens do not need visas to travel to the United States (i.e., visa waiver countries)? There are programs aimed at tackling this sub-group of actors. One of the known efforts pursued by DHS involves enhancements to the previously established Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA)<sup>22</sup> used by Customs and Border Protection to vet prospective travelers from visa waiver countries “to determine if they pose a law enforcement or security risk before they board aircraft destined for the United States.”<sup>23</sup> DHS has stated that ESTA has been a “highly effective security and vetting tool” enabling “DHS to deny travel under the [Visa Waiver Program] to thousands of prospective travelers who may pose a risk to the United States [presumably endangering national security or public safety], prior to those individuals boarding a U.S. bound aircraft.”<sup>24</sup> However, since ESTA is a biographic and not a biometric security check, and there is no interview by a consular officer, some contend that ESTA does not provide the same level of screening as applying for a visa.<sup>25</sup>

### **Investigation: Targeting “the Departed,” “the Returned,” and “the Inspired”**

The FBI is the lead agency for investigating the federal crime of terrorism, and its IS-related cases largely have targeted suspects that this report describes as “the departed,” “the returned,” and “the inspired.”<sup>26</sup> The bureau relies on other U.S. federal agencies (such as DHS, the State

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the State Department’s Consular Lookout and Support System as well as DHS’s TECS (not an acronym). After such screening, if a visa applicant has an exact or possible “match to a record in a specific database held by DHS,” the applicant is *vetted*. Vetting involves

- researching and investigating the visa applicant,
- examining documents submitted with the visa application,
- interviewing the applicant, and
- consulting with consular, law enforcement, or other officials.

Agents in the Visa Security Units can also vet applicants if the applicants match “case selection guidelines” but did not generate exact or possible matches in the screening process. In FY2012, HSI agents screened 1.3 million visa applicants and vetted more than 171,000. See *The DHS Visa Security Program*, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations, “Preventing Terrorism—Visa Security Program,” Department of Homeland Security, *Congressional Budget Justification, FY2016*.

<sup>22</sup> Congress established ESTA so that those traveling under the VWP would undergo a security screening before traveling to the United States.

<sup>23</sup> For details see CBP press release, “Strengthening Security of the VWP through Enhancements to ESTA.” For background on the Visa Waiver Program, see CRS Report RL32221, *Visa Waiver Program*, by (name redacted).

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, written statement.

<sup>25</sup> See CRS Report RL32221, *Visa Waiver Program*, by (name redacted).

<sup>26</sup> Pursuant to 28 C.F.R. 0.85(1), the Attorney General has assigned responsibility to the Director of the FBI to “(1) Exercise Lead Agency responsibility in investigating all crimes for which it has primary or concurrent jurisdiction and which involve terrorist activities or acts in preparation of terrorist activities within the statutory jurisdiction of the United States. Within the United States, this would include the collection, coordination, analysis, management and dissemination of intelligence and criminal information as appropriate.” If another federal agency identifies an individual who is engaged in terrorist activities or in acts in preparation of terrorist activities, the other agency is (continued...)



Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and NCTC) as well as state, local, and foreign governments for assistance and investigative leads.<sup>27</sup> Specifically, in recent weeks media reporting has suggested that local police have been enlisted in some locations to help with surveillance of possible terrorism suspects tied to the Islamic State.<sup>28</sup>

Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs) led by the FBI play the chief role in coordinating federal counterterrorism investigations across the United States, bringing together federal, state, and local participants in the process.<sup>29</sup> There are more than 100 JTTFs across the country in the FBI's field offices and resident agencies. JTTFs are locally based, multiagency teams of investigators, analysts, linguists, special weapons and tactics (SWAT) experts, and other specialists who *investigate* terrorism and terrorism-related crimes.<sup>30</sup> Among their many roles, the agents, task force officers, and analysts working on JTTFs gather leads, evidence, and information related to these cases. They analyze this information and help develop cases for prosecution, most often pursued in federal court. JTTF members share leads and information from counterterrorism cases with federal, state, and local partners to coordinate counterterrorism investigations and broaden U.S. counterterrorism efforts.<sup>31</sup> In June 2012, one FBI official stated that there were over 6,000 open JTTF investigations.<sup>32</sup> Over 4,100 federal, state, and local law enforcement officers and agents work on them (including more than 1,500 people from more than 600 partner agencies), more than four times the total prior to 9/11.<sup>33</sup>

### Known American Plots

Based on publicly available information, CRS has been able to identify 36 plots implicating American suspects who allegedly showed some level of affiliation with the Islamic State. Some of the plots involved more than one individual, and as a group, the plots accounted for about 75 suspects. These cases came to light in 2014 and 2015. It appears that

- 24 of the plots fit into the category of “the departed,”
- 2 plots involved individuals who returned to the United States, and
- 12 plots included people inspired to commit terrorist acts in the United States.

*Note: two plots had people who can be categorized as part of “the departed” group and ones who fit “the inspired” subset.*

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required to promptly notify the FBI.

<sup>27</sup> Dana Priest and William M. Arkin, “Monitoring America,” *Washington Post*, December 20, 2010. For more information on how the FBI investigates terrorism, see CRS Report R41780, *The Federal Bureau of Investigation and Terrorism Investigations*, by (name redacted).

<sup>28</sup> Evan Perez and Shimon Prokupez, “FBI Struggling with Surge in Homegrown Terror Cases,” *CNN*, May 30, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *FBI Information Sharing Report, 2011*, (2012) p. 6, <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/national-information-sharing-strategy-1/information-sharing-report-2011>.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*; Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Protecting America Against Terrorist Attack: A Closer Look at Our Joint Terrorism Task Forces,” May 2009; Brig Barker and Steve Fowler, “The FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force Officer,” *The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, vol. 77, no. 11 (November 2008), p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Program Manager, Information Sharing Environment, *Information Sharing Environment: Annual Report to the Congress*, June 30, 2012, p. 15, [http://ise.gov/sites/default/files/ISE\\_Annual\\_Report\\_to\\_Congress\\_2012.pdf](http://ise.gov/sites/default/files/ISE_Annual_Report_to_Congress_2012.pdf). Hereinafter: Program Manager, Information Sharing Environment, *Information Sharing Environment: Annual Report* (2012).

<sup>32</sup> Kerry Sleeper, Deputy Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, remarks during Panel II of the “Intelligence and Information Sharing to Protect the Homeland,” conference sponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Intelligence and National Security Alliance, June 27, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> James B. Comey, Jr., Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, written statement for a U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary hearing, “Oversight of the Federal Bureau of Investigation,” May 21, 2014; Federal Bureau of (continued...)



## ***Fusion Centers and Information Sharing***

During the past decade, law enforcement cooperation has increased in the area of information sharing, particularly the exchange of material tied to terrorist threats. A hallmark of this has been the development of state and major urban area fusion centers, designed *not* to investigate people or crimes but to share threat information. The more than 70 federally recognized fusion centers in operation are not federally led. Rather they are controlled by state and local entities and supported by the federal government.<sup>34</sup> They play a notable role in information and intelligence sharing, bringing together federal, state, and local law enforcement and security professionals working on counterterrorism and crime issues.<sup>35</sup> Sharing can involve the reporting of suspicious activity to generate investigative leads for JTTFs to pursue. It can also include the exchange of more finished intelligence analysis discussing the evolution and nature of existing threats.

## **Stopping Radicalized Individuals from Morphing into Terrorists**

Thwarting terrorist plotters also involves understanding the intricacies of radicalization—especially determining when individuals move from radical activity involving First Amendment-protected behavior to violent extremism (i.e., terrorism).<sup>36</sup> Thus, the U.S. government faces the difficult task of finding ways to keep people who are radicalizing or radicalized from morphing into terrorists. Regarding the Islamic State, the FBI, DHS, and NCTC are working to understand the motivations driving people to radicalize and join terrorist groups in Syria.<sup>37</sup> Ideally, this work

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Investigation, “Protecting America from Terrorist Attack: Our Joint Terrorism Task Forces,” [http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/terrorism/terrorism\\_jtfs](http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/terrorism/terrorism_jtfs). Seventy-one of the 103 JTTFs currently operated by DOJ and the FBI were created since 9/11. The number of top-secret security clearances issued to local police working on JTTFs has increased. The number rose from 125 to 878 between 2007 and 2009. Kevin Johnson, “FBI Issues More Top Secret Clearance for Terrorism Cases,” *USA Today*, August 12, 2010; STRATFOR, *A Decade of Evolution in U.S. Counterterrorism Operations*, Special Report, December 2009. There is also a National JTTF, which was established in July 2002 to serve as a coordinating mechanism with the FBI’s partners. Some 40 agencies are now represented in the National JTTF, which has become a focal point for information sharing and the management of large-scale projects that involve multiple partners. See Department of Justice, “Joint Terrorism Task Force,” <http://www.justice.gov/jttf/>.

<sup>34</sup> Such support can involve funding, technical assistance, technological resources, and personnel detailed to particular centers, for example. See Department of Homeland Security, “State and Major Urban Area Fusion Centers.”

<sup>35</sup> Department of Homeland Security, “State and Major Urban Area Fusion Centers.” Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, *DHS’s Efforts to Coordinate and Enhance Its Support and Information Sharing with Fusion Centers*, November 16, 2011; Torin Monahan and Neal A. Palmer, “The Emerging Politics of DHS Fusion Centers,” *Security Dialogue*, vol. 40, no. 6 (December 2009); P.L. 110-53, §511, 121 STAT. 318. Amends *Homeland Security Act of 2002* by adding §210A(a).

<sup>36</sup> For this report, “radicalization” describes the process of acquiring and holding radical or extremist beliefs (constitutionally protected activity); and “terrorism” or “violent extremism” describe illegal action—often violent—taken on the basis of these radical or extremist beliefs. The radicalization process is best depicted in broad brush strokes. No single path from radical to terrorist can be traced. No specific personality profile can be used to determine who will become a terrorist, and some scholars have argued that it is even unclear whether all terrorists go through a radicalization process. For example, see Peter R. Neumann, “The Trouble with Radicalization,” *International Affairs*, vol. 89, no. 4, (2013) pp. 873–893; and Erik Pruyt and Jan H. Kwakkel, “Radicalization under Deep Uncertainty: A Multimodel Exploration of Activism, Extremism, and Terrorism,” *System Dynamics Review*, vol. 30, no 1 (January-June 2014): pp. 1–28.

<sup>37</sup> Brookings Institution, “A National Counterterrorism Center Threat Assessment of ISIL and Al Qaeda in Iraq, Syria, and Beyond,” “Proceedings,” September 3, 2014, [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2014/09/03-national-counterterrorism-center-threat-assessment-isil-al-qaeda-iraq-syria-beyond/20140903\\_isil\\_syria\\_transcript.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2014/09/03-national-counterterrorism-center-threat-assessment-isil-al-qaeda-iraq-syria-beyond/20140903_isil_syria_transcript.pdf).

prevents people from ever falling into the “departed,” “returned,” “inspired,” “others,” or “lost” categories described above.

More generally, American counter-radicalization approaches favor government engagement with communities affected by terrorism. The U.S. government has a strategy aimed at countering violent extremism (CVE), much of which is focused on the domestic arena.<sup>38</sup> The Administration’s CVE strategy revolves around countering the radicalization of all types of potential terrorists. As such, the radicalization of violent jihadists falls under its purview and is the key focus. The initial August 2011 strategy was supported by the Administration’s release in December 2011 of its “Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States” (SIP).<sup>39</sup> The SIP is a large-scale planning document with three major objectives and numerous future activities and efforts. The SIP’s three “core areas of activity” are “(1) enhancing engagement with and support to local communities that may be targeted by violent extremists; (2) building government and law enforcement expertise for preventing violent extremism; and (3) countering violent extremist propaganda while promoting our [U.S.] ideals.”<sup>40</sup> The Administration also held a CVE summit in February 2015.<sup>41</sup>

Examples of interagency efforts at CVE include the following:

- The National Security Council has coordinated an interagency “effort to work with Boston, Los Angeles, and Minneapolis/St. Paul to facilitate and support the development of locally-based, and driven, violent extremism prevention and intervention pilot frameworks.”<sup>42</sup>
- The Community Resilience Exercise, developed and presented by DHS and NCTC, brings together local law enforcement and community leaders in a specific locale to work through “a hypothetical violent extremist or foreign fighter-related scenario, including a hypothetical attack. The goal of the exercise is to build capacity within municipalities to mitigate the terrorist threat.”<sup>43</sup>
- The Community Awareness Briefing, developed by DHS and NCTC, is “a key tool [the agencies] use to convey information to local communities and authorities on the terrorist recruitment threat. The CAB now also includes information on the recruitment efforts of violent extremist groups based in Syria and Iraq.”<sup>44</sup> As of June 2015, the CAB had been presented in 15 U.S. cities.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> White House, *Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*, August 2011. For more on CVE see CRS Report R42553, *Countering Violent Extremism in the United States*, by (name redacted).

<sup>39</sup> White House, *Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*, December 2011.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2. See also “Working to Counter Online Radicalization to Violence in the United States,” February 5, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2013/02/05/working-counter-online-radicalization-violence-united-states>.

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/18/fact-sheet-white-house-summit-countering-violent-extremism>.

<sup>42</sup> Taylor, written statement.

<sup>43</sup> John Mulligan, Deputy Director, National Counterterrorism Center, written statement for a House Committee on Homeland Security hearing, “Terrorism Gone Viral: The Attack in Garland, Texas and Beyond,” June 2, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Nicholas J. Rasmussen, Deputy Director, National Counterterrorism Center, written statement for a Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs hearing, “Cybersecurity, Terrorism, and Beyond: Addressing Evolving Threats to the Homeland,” September 10, 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Taylor, written statement.

- Community engagement efforts pursued by the office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties in DHS, including June 2014 meetings in Los Angeles that covered topics concerning Syria and World Refugee Day.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Department of Homeland Security, Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, *Newsletter*, vol. 4. no. 6, June 2014.

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