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ISIS in America: A Sociohistorical Analysis

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ISIS in America: A Sociohistorical Analysis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Sociology

by

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Bachelor of Arts in International Relations, and Political Science, 2015

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Abstract

During the summer of 2014, the terrorist organization Islamic State (commonly referred to as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS) garnered international attention after its unprecedented territorial acquisitions and violence in the Middle East. Today, ISIS vies with al-Qaeda for leadership of the global Islamic Extremist movement and has extended its violence all over the world, including the United States. U.S. based supporters generally choose to engage with the ideology in one of three categories: as a foreign fighter, domestic plotter, or domestic non-plotter. Despite this threat, there is very little quantitative research concerning U.S. ISIS supporters and the incidents they plan.

Utilizing data from the American Terrorism Study (ATS), the current study compares ISIS perpetrators across the three support type categories, as well as ISIS and al-Qaeda and Associated Movements (AQAM) affiliated persons and incidents in the United States. I conducted Chi Square and Conjunctive Analysis of Case Configurations to determine significant differences.

The analysis indicated significant difference across ISIS support types with regard to gender and age of the individuals, and suggested common patterns in the types of individuals who choose to leave the U.S. or stay and engage in violence. Additional analysis indicated significant differences in the residency status and race between ISIS and AQAM perpetrators. Finally, results showed that, although ISIS and AQAM incidents have different configurations concerning targets, weapons, and group size, their success rates are relatively the same. In conclusion, there are important differences between ISIS and AQAM affiliated persons and incidents that may merit considering them as separate entities rather than together under the umbrella of Islamic Extremist.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, terrorism prevention has been at the forefront of U.S. domestic and foreign policy. Today more than fifteen years after the attacks, many Americans still consider terrorism to be the primary concern facing the United States (Pew Research Center 2016). In the years following 9/11, the United States focused a massive amount of resources toward its “War on Terror” to prevent another attack of similar magnitude. The Islamic Extremist movement was of concern given al-Qaeda’s orchestration of the attacks. Today, the movement in the United States has undergone considerable change with the emergence of ISIS.

On the Fourth of July, 2014, a man named Abu Bakr al Baghdadi slowly climbed the steps of the Great Mosque in the Iraqi city of Mosul. Clad in the traditional black dress of Prophet Muhammad, Baghdadi proclaimed the renewal of an ancient Islamic caliphate and called on all Muslims to submit to his leadership. In the months prior, Baghdadi’s organization – then known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)¹ – mounted an offensive and taken control of large swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria. Gruesome images of the group’s violence following this unprecedented territorial acquisition stunned the world - the group seemed to have risen from nowhere.

Today, ISIS inspires and organizes attacks around the world, including in the United States. Despite this, we know very little quantitatively about the group and its adherents’ place in American terrorism. This shortage of information is reflective of a general trend in American terrorism literature across the ideological spectrum. Terrorism as a strategy in the U.S. has

¹ Though the group has gone through a number of name changes, this project will refer to the group currently known also as “Islamic State” as ISIS.

evolved over the past four decades, and research indicates that there are important differences in incident-related behaviors across ideological and organizational types of terrorist groups (Smith 2016). Terrorists motivated by differing ideologies may engage in violence in different ways.

Although it developed as an affiliate to al-Qaeda, ISIS now contends with the group for leadership of the global Islamic Extremist movement. The two once-connected organizations have important ideological and structural differences that led to a formal separation between the two in 2015. These differences may justify treating ISIS and al-Qaeda and Associated Movements (AQAM) as separate entities altogether, rather than considering them only under the umbrella of Islamic Extremism. Recent research suggests there may be differences within ideological categories themselves, including between ISIS and al-Qaeda related activities. Table 1 shows recent findings from the American Terrorism Study’s final report recently submitted to the National Institute of Justice (2016) examining precursor behaviors across ideologies.

Variable	All	Far-Left	Environmental	Far-Right	AQAM	ISIS	Chi-Square p value
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Number of Preparatory Acts (n=344)							.000
0-2	42.7	7.1	69.7	48.8	27.9	17.2	
3-5	19.5	26.2	12.4	23.6	16.4	20.7	
6+	37.8	66.7	18.0	27.6	55.7	62.1	
Number of Recorded Meetings (n=206)							.412
0	49.5	51.9	58.0	46.3	48.9	39.3	
1-3	25.7	25.9	30.0	25.9	23.4	21.4	
4+	24.8	22.2	12.0	27.8	27.7	39.3	
Length of Planning Cycle (n=277)							.000
0-20 days	25.6	7.3	48.1	21.4	7.1	29.0	
21-95 days	26.0	14.6	20.3	32.1	16.7	51.6	
96-285 days	23.8	22.0	19.0	23.8	38.1	19.4	
286+ days	24.5	56.1	12.7	22.6	38.1	0.0	

Table 1. Key Variables by Category of Terrorism (Cont.)

Variable	All	Far-Left	Environmental	Far-Right	AQAM	ISIS	Chi-Square
	%	%	%	%	%	%	p value
Number of Offenders (n=398)							.000
1	37.2	8.6	13.2	54.5	62.5	42.9	
2-3	40.5	51.4	54.9	28.5	29.2	45.2	
4+	22.4	40.0	31.9	17.1	8.3	11.9	
Sophistication (n=448)							.000
Least	37.9	1.3	94.5	27.8	7.9	18.6	
Moderately	14.7	6.6	0.0	21.4	21.1	41.9	
Most	47.3	92.1	5.5	50.8	71.1	39.5	
Incident Failure (n=469)							.000
Failed	42.2	23.8	22.7	41.2	75.3	75.0	
Successful	57.8	76.3	77.3	58.8	24.7	25.0	

The analysis found variation across group types not only in the volume of preparatory acts committed prior to an incident, but also the type of preparatory acts, the length of the preparatory process (planning cycle), and the number of persons participating in the incident. The results concerning success rates across group types are also significant and indicate that AQAM and ISIS have extremely similar proportions of success in their incidents despite their differences across other factors.

As the threat of ISIS intensifies, it is important to understand how this relatively new terrorist group operates in the historical context of American terrorism and whether it departs from its ideological counterpart to better inform law enforcement practice and policy. A key part of this may lie in understanding not only *who* supports ISIS but also *how* they go about doing so or planning to do so.

In an effort to begin filling this gap, this project asks two major research questions

concerning ISIS-related activity in the United States:

1. Are there differences between U.S. ISIS supporters who choose to support ISIS abroad compared to those who choose to support ISIS in the United States?
2. Are there differences between violent domestic ISIS plots and those developed by the broader Islamic Extremist movement in the U.S., as represented by AQAM?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since this project attempts to place ISIS in some historical context, the first portion of this chapter constitutes a general history of how the Islamic State evolved out of the global Islamic Extremist movement and arrived at its current state. The second portion of this chapter focuses on the structural history of terrorism in the United States and how ISIS' global strategy fits within that structure. The last section of the chapter includes a discussion of the limited quantitative literature concerning ISIS and Islamic Extremist terrorism in the United States.

The Development of the Modern Islamic Extremist Movement

The modern Islamic Extremist movement began to take shape in the middle of the 20th century in the works of an Egyptian named Sayyid Qutb (Wright 2006). His writings grew to include two main themes: 1) the superiority of Islam as a political and social structure, and 2) the necessity to implement this superiority by resisting western influence and its presence in the Islamic world. Three years after World War II ended, a then middle-aged Qutb visited the United States on scholarship. He expected the world's hegemon to be a beacon of success and culture, but was appalled with what he found. Qutb saw the United States as a Godless wasteland of materialistic excess. His negative views, like those of many in the Middle East, were compounded by the betrayal felt for American recognition of the state of Israel. Upon returning to Egypt, Qutb wrote of the United States:

It is the case of a people who have reached the peak of growth and elevation in the world of science and productivity, while remaining abysmally primitive in the world of the senses, feelings, and behavior. A people who have not exceeded the most primordial levels of existence (Qutb 1951:11).

Qutub argued that a social system based completely on Islam would prevent the Middle East from suffering the same fate of barbarism. After Egypt emerged from its revolution to oust British colonial rule, the country's new leader, Abdel Nasser, clashed with Qutb (Wright, 2006). Nasser, a relatively secular Arab nationalist, did not appreciate Qutb's brand of Islamism and calls for an Islamic vanguard. Qutb was critical of Nasser and viewed him as a western puppet standing in the way of Islamic revolution. After being accused of complicity in an assassination attempt on Nasser, Qutub was imprisoned. Before his execution in the late 1960s, he wrote prolifically on the need for rejuvenation of fundamentalist Islam. In his book *Milestones*, Qutb called for the complete and destruction of all existing political and social orders in favor of a system with Islam at its center (Qutb 1964).

Though Nasser hoped that Qutb's radical ideology would die with him, unrest in the region facilitated the ideology's expansion. The 1960s and 1970s saw a series of conflicts that heightened anti-Western sentiment. Wars between Israel and Arab countries throughout both decades were a major point of contention. The conflicts spurred conversation away from Nasser's brand of secularism and toward Islamic revolution, transcending even the Sunni-Shiite divide. Violent Shiite Islamic revolution succeeded in Iran, where American involvement in perpetuating the unpopular Shah's reign had fostered an intense – and enduring – anti-Americanism (Goldschmidt, Jr. and Davidson 2009). Before the revolution, Iran had been considered one of America's strongest allies in the region, serving as what President Carter in a 1977 New Year's speech called an "island of stability" for American interests (Goldschmidt, Jr. and Davidson 2009:365). The United States' strained relationship with Iran endures to this day.

In 1979, the same year as the Iranian Revolution, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The invasion served as another rallying point for Islamic revolutionary ideology, and the ensuing

proxy war served as a refinery for the militant Islamist ideology and its future leaders (Wright 2006). One such leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, was heavily influenced by Qutb's writings and had been organizing his own band of militants. Like Qutb, he became increasingly radicalized after a stint in prison. Another future leader of the movement, Osama bin Laden, found purpose in fighting alongside the mujahedeen in Afghanistan. During the war, bin Laden envisioned a force that would champion the Islamist cause across the world and push the communists out of Afghanistan to make way for an Islamic State as Qutb envisioned. Secretly established in 1988, bin Laden called the organization al-Qaeda – literally translated as “the base” for the worldwide Islamist movement (Miller 2012). Over the next two decades, al-Qaeda would become just that.

Ten years after invading, the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan. Within two years, the Soviet Union itself fell. Bin Laden considered it a massive victory for the mujahedeen and the Islamist movement as a whole (Wright 2006). After the Soviet-Afghan war, bin Laden returned to his business practices but did not completely disengage from the movement. Though the United States supported the effort to push its Cold War rival out of Afghanistan, its support of Israel and continued military presence – particularly in Saudi Arabia – angered bin Laden. With the Soviet Union vanquished, the United States “was the only power capable of blocking the restoration of the ancient Islamic caliphate, and it would have to be confronted and defeated” (Wright 2006:199). After being pushed out of his native Saudi Arabia under political pressure, bin Laden spent the next seven years traveling across the Middle East and parts of Africa, funding various al-Qaeda training camps.

In 1993, Ramzi Yousef, a product of one such training camp in Afghanistan, brought violence on behalf of al-Qaeda to U.S. soil. He drove an explosive-laden truck into the parking garage under the World Trade Center in New York City in an attempt to bring the towers and

subsequently the U.S. economy down. Though the attack did not destroy the financial system, it resulted in six deaths and brought awareness of al-Qaeda to Americans. Later that same year, a newspaper article detailed bin Laden's role as a businessman "putting his army on the road to peace" (Fisk 1993). In the article, bin Laden scoffed at allegations of ongoing involvement in the violent Islamist movement. After a combination of business stagnation, continued American presence in Saudi Arabia, and an increasingly strained relationship with his country and family, bin Laden decided to leave his business ventures behind and once again take up the mantle of militant (Wright 2006).

In 1993, he returned to Afghanistan, his commitment to the movement renewed. He issued a fatwa entitled "Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places" and met with Ramzi Yousef's uncle. The two discussed his nephew's previous World Trade Center attack and ideas for future plots, some involving hijacking aircraft. Two years after the first fatwa, bin Laden issued a second. He declared it to be the duty of all Muslims to kill Americans wherever and however they could to help with the war against the west. By this point, Zawahiri's group (al-Jihad) had joined with al-Qaeda, and the movement became increasingly violent (Miller 2012).

The group directed several prominent attacks, including the bombings of US embassies and the USS Cole in 1998. Under bin Laden and Zawahiri's leadership, al-Qaeda became the face of the Islamic Extremist movement in the United States and around the globe. Despite the increased violence, Americans were not fully aware of the threat until the morning of September 11, 2001 (Stern, 2003). After perpetrating the deadliest terrorist attack in U.S. history, al-Qaeda served as a banner for other Islamist groups to organize under. From the landscape of international turmoil

following 9/11, ISIS emerged in Iraq as one of many al-Qaeda affiliates, set on accomplishing the task Sayyid Qutb called for decades earlier: the creation of an Islamic State.

The Emergence of ISIS

As with al-Qaeda, a veteran of the Soviet-Afghan war laid the foundations for ISIS (Bunzel 2015). Abu Mus'ab al Zaraqawi, a Jordanian, emerged from the conflict dedicated to the cause of violent Islamism. After being released from a prison stint in 1999, Zaraqawi traversed between al-Qaeda training camps. When the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001, Zaraqawi left for Iraq. Once there, he founded a group called the Jama't al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad (the Group of Monotheism and Jihad). Zaraqawi's group, as described by Bunzel (2015) consisted of two main ideological tenets: 1) A desire to see the restoration of the Islamic caliphate; and 2) A hatred of the Shiite sect of Islam. The divide between Sunni and Shiite Muslims dates back to the years following Prophet Muhammad's death. After Prophet died without leaving explicit plans for a successor as caliph. As head of the faith, the caliph unites all Muslims under Islam and presides over a geographic area, or caliphate. In extremely simple terms, Muahmmad's followers disagreed on whether his successor should be a blood relative or nominated companion (Brown 2009). After four caliphs succeeded him, the disagreement resulted in the Shiite and Sunni factions.

Today, the vast majority of Muslims are Sunni. Iraq, however, is a majority Shiite country. After the U.S. invasion in 2003, Iraq proved to be the ideal place to turn ideology into action (Stern 2015). Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath party had favored the country's Sunni minority. When he was deposed by the United States, the ensuing democratic government reflected the Shiite

majority. For ISIS' predecessor, this was wholly unacceptable, as Zarqawi and his followers viewed Shiite Muslims as apostates and threats to true Islam.

Under ISIS' strict ideology, apostasy merits a death sentence. Essentially, killing Shiites – and therefore killing apostates – is not killing fellow Muslims; it is cleansing the faith of a dangerous idolatry and protecting the true form of Islam. Justification for this portion of their ideology comes from its interpretation of the Islamic concept of jihad. Essentially meaning struggle, jihad generally exists in two forms: inner and outer. Inner jihad, the predominant form of jihad, refers to the inner struggle within every Muslim to grow in their faith and relationship with Allah. Outer jihad refers to physical struggle for the faith and is justified in a defensive context when the faith or its followers are attacked, and is generally the way al-Qaeda views jihad and justifies its violence (Goldschmidt, Jr. and Davidson 2009). ISIS, on the other hand, subscribes to a brand of jihad advocated for by Sayyid Qutb. He argued that establishing the caliphate requires another form of outer jihad: offensive (Wright 2006; Bunzel 2015). In this form, physical jihad justifies attacks against those who have not outwardly attacked Islam but represent a threat to it.

This ideological stance combined with political upheaval in Iraq proved well matched. Pushed out of government by the United States, scores of former Ba'athists suddenly found themselves without work or power. They flocked to Zarqawi's organization (then known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI²)), taking key leadership posts and becoming integral in the group's military, intelligence, and finance ministries (Coles and Parker 2015). Their involvement with ISIS has been a key factor in the group's relative success, bringing a degree of government experience to the caliphate (Stern 2015).

² Zarqawi pledged fealty to Osama bin Laden in 2004; the group was subsequently referred to as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

The group's violence against Shiites and civilians in Iraq, however, proved to be a point of separation between it and al-Qaeda central. In a 2005 letter, Zawahiri asked Zarqawi to limit the group's violence against civilians and reduce its "scenes of slaughter." (Stern 2015:22) When Zarqawi was killed in an airstrike a year later, AQI was left loosely organized. In the midst of tension between the groups, Bin Laden eulogized the late leader and emphasized their shared goal of establishing an Iraqi caliphate (Bunzel 2015). Afterward, without consulting al-Qaeda central, AQI assimilated other Iraqi groups. The new coalition announced it was establishing the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and changed its name accordingly.

This original caliphate, however, proved ineffectual. The absence of well-organized leadership, a limited audience, and lack of support from al-Qaeda leadership relegated the caliphate to a "paper state" (Bunzel 2015). When Abu Bakr al Baghdadi assumed leadership of the organization, ISI appeared to be faltering and near dissolution. His leadership would prove to be transformative (Stern 2015). He set to work rebuilding the organization and heavily recruiting former Ba'athists al al-Qaeda affiliate groups. When neighboring Syria was thrust into civil war, Baghdadi sensed an opportunity and began recruiting from the array of violent Islamist groups there. The group formally changed its name to "Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham" (ISIS) to reflect its new area of influence. This expansion into Syria further shook ISIS' relationship with al-Qaeda. Reconciliatory efforts failed, and al-Qaeda officially denounced ISIS as a separate entity from al-Qaeda on February 2, 2014.

Four months after the formal separation, ISIS moved through areas of Iraq and Syria, capturing territory in unprecedented fashion. By the end of June 2014, Baghdadi stood triumphantly in the city of Mosul and gave a symbolism-laden speech announcing the restoration of the ancient Muslim caliphate (Warrick 2016). He declared himself caliph and demanded

allegiance from Muslims around the world. Its location along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the most population dense areas due to their proximity to water, meant that the caliphate contained roughly up to ten million people (BBC 2016). Today, the caliphate and its major cities are the targets of airstrikes by a U.S. led coalition of nations. The airstrikes have reduced the size of the caliphate and severely impacted ISIS' ability to move resources and people throughout its territory (Warrick 2016).

A final, emblematic name change accompanied the announcement of the caliphate; the group would now be known as "the Islamic State" – reinforcing the group's assertion that its influence known no traditional borders, and has no geographic limitations. In Islam, Muslims are considered united by the faith with the concept of the ummah – the collective body of Islam (Brown 2009). When al-Baghdadi proclaimed himself caliph, he was not referring only to the people inhabiting the existing caliphate, but the entire body of Islam. Any potential threat to the faith from around the world constitutes an enemy and must be eliminated. With a vast swath of targets, including the United States, ISIS has reinvigorated the global Islamic Extremist movement.

The Strategic Evolution of American Terrorism

To understand ISIS in the context of U.S. terrorism, it is important to first look at how terrorism in the United States developed over time. The structure of American terrorist movements evolved across decades and ideologies because of the necessity to extend the longevity of each movement. Smith, Shields, and Damphousse (2013) describe three general strategies used to perpetrate terrorism in the United States over the last fifty years: the rural revolutionary model, the cellular model, and the uncoordinated violence model.

Fidel Castro's Cuban Revolution best exemplified the Rural Revolutionary Model (RRM). Intended to facilitate full government overthrows, the RRM has four distinct components: 1) Capturing and holding terrain; 2) A hierarchical military structure; 3) The creation of "fixed compounds" to aid in land-taking; and 4) An extended support system. Having been successful in Cuba, Castro attempted to export the strategy to other revolutionaries around the world who were ultimately unsuccessful in its implementation. Despite Castro's success, the RRM's fixed structure made organizations that utilized it into easy targets for intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

In the United States, implementing the RRM proved difficult. The far-right attempted to use the strategy but was overwhelmingly unsuccessful. During the movement's flourish in the 1980s, far-right groups established fixed rural compounds intended to serve as bases for a coming war with the U.S. government. The groups intended to capture terrain and eventually draw new state boundaries beyond government jurisdiction. The isolation and well-defined structure of the groups made interdiction relatively easy. By the end of the 1980s, law enforcement had brought charges against (though not convicted) nearly every leader of the far-right movement.

Far-left groups in the United States saw the failure of international far-left application of the Rural Revolutionary Model, such as Che Guevara in Bolivia. With the prospect of taking and holding land a near impossibility in the United States, a new strategy developed. The Cellular Model (CM), used predominantly by far-left groups in the U.S., attempts to do away with much of the fixed structure that makes the RRM so easily penetrated. In the CM, group structure is far less centralized and loosely coordinated cells engage in attacks on the movement's behalf. While a handful of group members may know bits and pieces of the group's overall structure, it is more difficult to uncover the web of leadership and adherence in the movement.

The strategy fit well in urban areas where the far-left was most present, aided by books written specifically for the strategy, such as *The Anarchist Cookbook* and *The Minimanual of the Urban Guerilla*. While the American far-left eventually sank into obscurity, other ideologies have recently utilized the CM. When al-Qaeda directed the September 11th attacks, it utilized the CM to put a loosely connected group in the United States to plan and perpetrate the incidents.

While the CM has advantages over the RRM, a third model of terrorism does away with within-movement connections altogether. The Uncoordinated Violence Model (UVM) relies on a completely decentralized structure. Incidents are planned and executed without explicit direction from a parent group or cell. This, theoretically, makes interdiction extremely difficult. Usage of this strategy in the United States has spanned ideologies and is currently the major concern of law enforcement (Smith, Shields, and Damphousse 2013).

After the far-right's failure in the 1980s, the movement's leaders called for a shift in tactics to a strategy of "leaderless resistance." In 1995, Timothy McVeigh bombed the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in perhaps the most famous employ of the UVM, often referred to today as a "lone wolf" attack. Al-Qaeda's fatwas directed this same sort of independent action. The ease of spreading propaganda and directives for followers to engage in the UVM increased with the advent of the Internet. Even in the internet's early days, Environmental groups used it to post "direct actions" and log incidents independently perpetrated by the movement's adherents.

ISIS' Hybrid Strategy

The globalism of the Islamic State's ideology has resulted in a unique hybrid strategy unseen in the Islamic Extremist movement to date. Across the three strategies – rural revolutionary, cellular/group, and uncoordinated violence – U.S. violent support of ISIS filters generally into

two camps: foreign fighters and domestic supporters. The foreign fighters are those individuals who leave the United States to engage in the group’s violent Rural Revolutionary strategy in the caliphate. Domestic supporters remain in the United States and choose to either engage in violence by plotting an incident (domestic plotters) or supporting the group in some other way, such as recruiting, running propaganda sites, or sending resources (domestic non-plotters). Data suggests that the majority of ISIS supporters elect for the foreign fighter option. In an analysis of 102 ISIS-related indictees in the United States, 46 percent attempted to travel or fight alongside ISIS forces internationally, while 29 percent chose to plot attacks on U.S. soil rather than engage in violence abroad (Vidino and Hughes 2015).

Although ISIS’ most direct application of the Rural Revolutionary model exists in its territorial acquisitions in Iraq and Syria, the strategy impacts the United States as well. To secure the resources necessary to maintain its territory, ISIS utilizes international support, a military



Figure 1. Source: Hosken, Andrew. *Empire of Fear: Inside the Islamic State*. 2015.

hierarchical structure, and fixed compounds as centers of operation in keeping with the other tenets of the Rural Revolutionary Strategy (Stern 2015). Currently, this strategy’s implementation in the United States has been restricted to an international support highway that provides

fighters and resources to maintain the caliphate. Estimates of how many fighters have left the United States vary widely. In 2014, FBI director James Comey suggested “a few dozen” persons

in the United States had contact with ISIS, while other estimates put the number in the hundreds (Williams 2014).

While establishing a caliphate in the United States is not one of ISIS' immediate goals, future plans do include an expansion of the rural revolutionary strategy to the west. Its current priority is opposition to local threats to the security of the caliphate. ISIS affiliates have released maps describing the first steps in this expansion process (see Figure 1) with the eventual goal of dominating the world and bringing all Muslims under the fold of the caliphate. The plan focuses primarily on expanding toward the caliphate's immediate geographic neighbors, including parts of Europe. The ultimate goal is to unite all Muslims under central Islamic rule and eliminate all threats to the faith, including western people and culture. The purest versions of society and the caliphate cannot exist simultaneously with the west, and the United States would eventually be brought into the fold of the caliphate.

ISIS has made it a point to call on individuals in countries around the world to attack unbelievers and apostates wherever they find them (Warrick 2016). As previously discussed, the major difference between these two strategies is the degree to which the perpetrator(s) had outside help. While attacks perpetrated under the cellular structure are facilitated or directed by ISIS itself, attacks inspired by ISIS - without a formal connection to the group - fall under the Uncoordinated Violence Model.

The available literature suggests that the latter is ISIS' predominant strategy in the United States, but not necessarily in the entirety of the west. Cellular (ISIS directed) attacks comprise roughly 40 percent of ISIS incidents in the west (Homeland Security 2016). This is largely due to its geographic proximity to the caliphate and countries that ISIS is known to use as resource highways. Turkey has served an important function for the group as a means of transporting

fighters and plots internationally. The possibility of ISIS fighters traveling to the continent with Syrian refugees has also fueled concerns of developing ISIS cells.

France has been particularly affected by ISIS' cellular strategy. On November 13, 2015, several teams of ISIS supporters coordinated attacks throughout Paris. Armed with automatic weapons and explosives, the attackers killed 130 victims and injured hundreds more. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attacks, and a subsequent investigation revealed ISIS had organized the attacks from within France with the help of Fabian Claine, a known ISIS member and French national.

Detecting ISIS directed plots in the United States are decidedly more difficult. The same year as the Paris attacks, three men were arrested in a plot to behead anti-Islam activist Pamela Geller, who had organized a "Draw Muhammad" conference in Dallas, Texas. The three men were receiving direction and instruction from an ISIS member overseas through phone and Internet communications. The ISIS representative selected the target and instructed the perpetrators to obtain knives and use caution to avoid detection. Law enforcement had been surveilling the cell and foiled the incident after arresting one of the perpetrators as he attempted to attack police officers.

Almost the entirety of ISIS attacks in the United States have been inspired by, rather than directed by, ISIS. In San Bernardino, California, husband and wife Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik stormed Farook's holiday office party armed with homemade pipe bombs and assault rifles purchased by a friend. They killed 14 people and injured 24 more before both dying in a shootout with police. After the attack, the FBI called it an act of "homegrown terrorism" without a connection to ISIS, but ISIS claimed responsibility for inspiring the attack. In Orlando, Florida, 29-year old Omar Mateen professed his support of ISIS while shooting 49 people in a

nightclub in the deadliest terrorist attack in the United States since 9/11. Mateen appears to have acted alone, radicalizing after viewing ISIS propaganda online, staking out potential targets, and legally purchasing a firearm in the months leading up to the attack.

As the caliphate continues to lose territory and resources, intelligence officials have expressed fears that waves of former ISIS fighters returning to their respective countries will spur a shift of ISIS' still vast resources from the Rural Revolutionary strategy toward increasing attacks abroad. FBI director James Comey called this wave a "terrorist diaspora... like we've never seen before" with numbers potentially reaching into the thousands (Gerstein and Scholtes 2016). This suggests that the threat of violence in western countries, including the United States, could intensify and shift toward a more centrally directed, cellular strategy rather than an uncoordinated strategy.

With this in mind, it is increasingly important to learn about ISIS attacks in the United States. Should their strategy begin to shift, demographic and incident data may prove invaluable to U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies in determining who tends to become involved with which strategy. The existing empirical literature on ISIS gives a limited view of who ISIS' supporters in the United States are and how they engage in violence, but as the movement continuously evolves, it is necessary to continue to examine each characteristic.

Empirical Data Concerning ISIS in the United States

Existing quantitative data on ISIS and al-Qaeda in the United States is extremely limited. This section contains a summary of the literature available to facilitate the development of hypotheses relating to demographic and incident comparisons.

Demographics and Prevalence of Support Types

Little is known about the demographics of the ISIS membership. Existing literature concerning demographics of the movement has utilized court records as source materials and mostly evaluated ISIS supporters as one broad group. While findings across studies are generally consistent, they are not very detailed. These analyses have indicated that, at least in the United States, ISIS appears to be attracting a relatively young group of followers. The average age of ISIS recruits in the United States is approximately 26 to 27 years old across most studies, with ages ranging from 15 to 47 years (U.S. House Homeland Security Committee Majority Staff Report, 2016; Vidino and Hughes 2015; Greenburg 2016; Gorka and Gorka 2015). This age range indicates ISIS recruits are considerably younger, on average, than other American terrorists, including al-Qaeda affiliated individuals. While AQAM individuals were also fairly young compared to other terrorists, their average age was 30 years, with a range from 19 to 63 years (Simcox and Dyer 2013). With regard to ISIS support strategy, the available data does not contain much detail on demographic differences between those who choose to join the caliphate and those who choose to plan an incident in the United States.

Additionally, research indicates that both ISIS supporters and AQAM supporters are generally male, with roughly 90 percent and 95 percent, respectively (Greenburg 2016; Vidino and Hughes 2015; Threat Knowledge Group 2015; Simcox and Dyer 2013). A preponderance of male involvement is historically consistent with American terrorism overall, though the extent to which males outnumber females does tend to vary somewhat across ideologies. Finally, in each analysis the individuals were predominantly U.S. citizens or legal residents: somewhere between 75-79 percent overall. One analysis did differentiate between citizenship across domestic plotters and foreign fighters, and found that both consist of roughly 86 percent U.S. born individuals

(Greenburg 2016). By contrast, U.S. born perpetrators comprise approximately 54 percent of AQAM-related individuals (Simcox and Dyer 2013).

The data generally indicate that most ISIS supporters choose the foreign fighter rather than domestic plotter approach. An analysis from George Washington University's Program on Extremism studied 102 ISIS-related individuals indicted in the United States and found that, while 46 percent attempted to travel to fight alongside ISIS forces, 29 percent plotted attacks on U.S. soil (Vidino and Hughes 2015). A 2015 analysis from the Threat Knowledge Group reported similar findings – 30 percent of U.S. ISIS supporters plotting attacks on U.S. soil compared to 52 percent attempting to travel overseas.

Based on the existing literature regarding demographic information, I tested the following hypotheses concerning ISIS persons across support types³ and in comparison to AQAM-affiliated individuals:

H₁: Domestic plotters are expected to be younger, on average, compared to foreign fighters.

H₂: There will be no significant difference in the resident status across support types.

H₃: There will be no significant difference in gender across the support types.

H₄: ISIS perpetrators are expected to be younger, on average, compared to AQAM perpetrators.

H₄: A higher proportion of ISIS perpetrators are expected to be U.S. born citizens compared to AQAM perpetrators.

H₅: ISIS perpetrators will have a higher percentage of female involvement compared to AQAM perpetrators.

³ Support types refer to foreign fighters, domestic plotters, and domestic non-plotters.

Incident Characteristics

Some of the literature also explores incident characteristics. One study examined 101 ISIS plots against the west as a whole through 2015 and 2016 and found that ISIS' incidents success rates, destructiveness, and degree of direct-involvement in plots has increased. Of those 101 plots, 41 were directed against the United States with most plots pursuing civilian targets (Homeland Security 2016). By contrast, al-Qaeda's primary target-type is military-related (Gruenewald et al. 2014).

One source included information about weapon type, and reports that ISIS plotters prefer firearms as the most common weapon, followed by explosives (Greenburg 2016). An analysis by the START research center in 2014 indicated that, for al-Qaeda, the opposite was true: their plotters favored the usage of explosives first and firearms second. Differing weapon types can have a variety of implications on the feasibility, destructiveness, and preparatory activity required to commit the incident. Weapon accessibility is hotly debated in the United States currently and additional data concerning weapons preferences could assist legal policy development as well as law enforcement practices.

The hypotheses tested are based partially on the literature concerning weapon and target types, but also the NIJ Sequencing report (Smith 2016) that suggested variation across terrorism categories regarding plan cycle, weapon types (sophistication), success rates, and group size. For the current project, the following hypotheses concerning ISIS and AQAM incidents were tested:

H₆: ISIS incidents will be less successful compared to AQAM incidents.

H₇: ISIS incidents will have, on average, shorter planning cycles compared to AQAM incidents.

H₈: Weapon type will vary significantly between ISIS and AQAM incidents, with ISIS incidents including a higher proportion of firearms than explosives.

H₉: Target type will vary significantly between AQAM and ISIS incidents, with ISIS incidents including a higher proportion of civilian targets than military targets.

The literature indicates that there are differences in both the types of persons and types of plots associated with ISIS and AQAM in the United States and around the world. These hypotheses aim to test those basic differences and suggest that the two groups, though similar in roots, manifest the ideology of Islamic Extremism in significantly different ways. The variables, source material, and methodology of the current study are detailed in the following section.

CHAPTER THREE

DATA AND METHODS

The American Terrorism Study

This project utilizes data from the American Terrorism Study (ATS), housed in the University of Arkansas Terrorism Research Center. An open-source relational database, the ATS contains data extracted from federal terrorism-related court cases obtained through the online Public Access to Court Electronic Records (PACER) system. These documents are supplemented by media sources. Though the Federal Bureau of Investigation initially selected cases for inclusion in the ATS, terrorism cases are now identified mainly through the Executive Office of United States Attorneys (EOUSA) web site and media reports. When including a case in the database, the ATS endeavors to remain in keeping with the following FBI definition of terrorism: “The unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”

Information from these court case and media documents is coded into nearly 500 variables, split into two main forms: court case coding and incident coding. The legal portion of the database considers the terrorism-related cases from a legal standpoint. This includes data such as the charges filed in an indictment, the result of each count (guilty plea, jury conviction, acquittal, etc.), and the type of defense employed by the defense. The incident portion of the database considers the contents of the court documents from a geospatial and temporal perspective.

Terrorism incidents and incident related behaviors, referred to as antecedents, are extracted from the documents. To be included as an incident in the ATS database, a perpetrator must have taken at least one preparatory step toward the completion of an incident. The locations of

antecedent activities are geographically coded, and also, to the extent possible, date-stamped. Incident-level coding also includes data concerning the type of weapon used or intended to be used in the attack. This project utilizes variables from both the incident portion of the database and the court case portion of the database.

Measurement

This section details the variables analyzed from the ATS and their operationalization, as well as a brief description of the types of analyses utilized.

Person Variables	Incident Variables
Gender	Plan Cycle
Age at Arrest	Weapon Type
Race	Number of Offenders
Resident Status	Success
Support Type	Target Type

To evaluate the hypotheses associated with research question one, I utilized the following variables: *support type*, *resident status*, *race*, *gender*, and *age at arrest*. To evaluate my hypotheses associated with research question one, I utilized the following variables: *support type*, *resident status*, *race*, *gender*, and *age at arrest*. *Support type* is a categorical variable that designates ISIS-affiliated individuals as 0=Domestic Plotters, 1=Foreign Fighters, and 2=Domestic Non-Plotter/Other. Domestic plotters are individuals who plan to perpetrate an incident or attack on U.S. soil. Foreign fighters refer to individuals who opt – either by deed or by intent - to leave the country and travel overseas to support ISIS. Domestic Non-Plotters are

other individuals who neither plan an attack nor plan/attempt to travel overseas. These individuals support ISIS in nonviolent ways, such as recruiting online or sending money.

Resident Status is also a categorical variable that codes the individual's U.S. residency as 0=U.S. born citizen, 1=Naturalized citizen, 2=Legal resident, 3=Illegal resident. This variable is coded at the time of the individual's indictment or at the time of the incident (or their death, if applicable.) *Race* is separated into three categories: 0=White, 1=Black/African American, 2=Other. White is considered a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It also includes people who indicate their race as "White" or report entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Near Easterner, Arab, or Polish. The "Other" category includes Asian individuals and those coded originally as "Some Other Race". *Gender* is dichotomized as 0=male or 1=female, and *Age at Arrest* codes the age, in years, of the individual upon arrest. In situations where there was no arrest date (either the individual died or became a fugitive and was not arrested), I supplemented the age at death in the incident or at the age of indictment.

Analysis of the hypotheses associated with research question two included person variables coded in the same fashion as previously described (*resident status*, *gender*, *race*, and *age at arrest*) and incident level variables: *plan cycle*, *weapon type*, *target type*, *number of offenders*, and *success*. *Plan Cycle* is a continuous variable that codes the length in days between the first preparatory activity associated with the incident and the date of the incident. If the incident did not occur, the date it was intended to occur will be coded. In cases where an incident date cannot be found or reasonably approximated, the variable is coded using the first preparatory activity and the indictment date. For the purposes of analysis, I created a new variable along quartiles of the Plan Cycle, splitting it into 0=0-2 months, 1=2-4 months, 2=4 months to 1 year, and 3=more

than 1 year. *Weapon Type* codes the most destructive type of weapon used or intended to be used in the incident as (from most destructive to least) 0=Explosives, 1=Firearms, 2=Other. The “Other” category is a collapsed category that consists of 12 incidents that utilized a “melee” weapon, 6 incidents coded as “other unspecified weapons”, and one incident involving an “incendiary weapon.”

Target Type characterizes the type of target attacked or intended to be attacked during the incident as 0=Military, 1=Government, 2=Civilian, 3=Business/Financial, 4=Transportation, or 5=Other. The “Other” category includes 3 incidents with Educational targets, 7 religious, and 16 coded as other unspecified target types. *Number of Offenders* is a continuous variable that captures the number of perpetrators involved in the conspiracy. This can include terrorist offenders themselves but also confidential informants or undercover agents if the terrorist offender perceived that individual to be a part of the planning/preparatory group. Finally, *Success* codes whether the attack was 0=Unsuccessful (incident prevent or failed to occur due to plot cancellation, complete device failure, or human intervention) or 1=Successful (all weapons were delivered to the intended target and caused an observable amount of damage). Attacks that are partially successful (i.e. the incident occurred on the intended target but weapons failed to detonate or discharge as initially intended) are included in the successful category. Incidents and persons were both dichotomized as either 0=AQAM or 1=ISIS. Individuals are coded as ISIS if court or media documents specifically indicated they had pledged fealty to or somehow supported the group, but as AQAM if there was no explicit affiliation. Simply viewing ISIS propaganda in search history or discussing the group does not qualify an individual to be coded as ISIS-affiliated, but reposting and creating propaganda explicitly supporting the group does.

Methods of Analysis

The first analysis conducted for research question 1 included chi square analyses of the demographic variables with *support type* as the independent variable. I also performed conjunctive analysis of case configurations utilizing the syntax and methodology described by Miethe, Hart, and Regoeczi (2008) to examine differences across ISIS individuals' support type. Conjunctive analysis (CACC) examines the most common case configurations in a dataset and generates an average value for a specified output variable. Commonly used for risk factor analysis, conjunctive analysis allows one to essentially examine a perfect storm of factors and their average outcome.

For example, if the model is generating the most common sets of risk factors for an armed assault from a dataset containing situational variables, conjunctive analysis groups cases together with the same configuration of factors (e.g. time of day, race of victim, race of perpetrator, etc.) and generates an average for a given output variable. In this case, if the average output variable (say, where 0=unarmed assault and 1=armed assault) value was .75, this would indicate that 75% of situations with that set of factors resulted in an armed assault. For this project, conjunctive analysis is used to predict ISIS support type (domestic plotter, foreign fighter, or domestic non-plotter) based on the most common configurations of demographic factors. In order to ensure the output variable (support type) was dichotomous, this first CACC examines support type as either foreign or domestic – essentially, whether or not individuals chose to stay in the United States (0) or wanted to leave (1). The second CACC model concerning support type considers those who chose to stay in the United States and separates them into two groups, domestic non-plotters (0) and domestic plotters (1). In addition, unless otherwise indicated, only configurations with

more than 5 cases were included in the CACC tables in keeping with previous research standards recommended when sample size is less than 1,000 (Hart 2014).

As with the hypotheses concerning research question one, the analysis associated with research question two includes chi square statistics, first with perpetrators and then with incidents. Both analyses utilized affiliation – AQAM versus ISIS – as the independent variable. The conjunctive analysis concerning incidents predicts success rates based on incident configurations.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This first portion of this chapter includes descriptive statistics of the dataset. The second section contains the results of the chi-square and conjunctive analyses, beginning with the analysis concerning variation across support types, followed by AQAM-ISIS analyses.

Descriptive Statistics

For this analysis, the ATS contains 1,428 federal “terrorism-related” court cases involving nearly 2,000 persons. Of the persons in the database, 836 individuals are linked to either AQAM or ISIS. To be linked to one of these ideological categories, the person must have either been indicted in a court case designated as being linked to AQAM or ISIS or have been involved in an incident designated as linked to AQAM or ISIS. Since this project is concerned specifically with U.S. Islamic Extremists, I applied a citizenship control to ensure that only U.S. supporters of the group were included in the analysis. Any non-U.S. citizen with a resident status of “Not Applicable” was excluded from all analysis, as it indicates that the individual was not in the United States prior to or upon being indicted. Individuals who do not have residential status coded were eliminated from the data set, further bringing the total eligible person sample size down to 263 AQAM-affiliated persons and 135 ISIS-affiliated persons (398 individuals total). To examine whether or not the lack of coding made the sample less representative, I conducted chi square analyses of both the residential-limited data set and the non-limited dataset, and found no significant differences across demographics.

From here, since this project focuses only on AQAM-affiliated persons who participated in the planning and/or carrying out of an incident (and were either indicted for their participation or

died during the attack), I eliminated AQAM individuals not linked to an incident, bringing the number of AQAM persons included in the analysis to 69. The ISIS sample remained 135 to enable comparison across support type, which came to 47 domestic plotters, 52 foreign fighters, and 36 domestic non-plotters. In total, the data set contains 204 individual persons.

		N	%		
Resident Status	U.S. Born	83	62.4		
	Naturalized	20	15.0		
	Legal Resident	26	19.5		
	Illegal Resident	4	3.0		
	Total	133	100.0		
Gender	Male	118	88.1		
	Female	16	11.9		
	Total	134	100.0		
Race	White	73	54.9		
	Black	54	40.6		
	Other	6	4.5		
	Total	133	100.0		
Support Type	Domestic Plotter	48	35.6		
	Foreign Fighter	52	38.5		
	Domestic Non-Plotter	35	25.9		
	Total	135	100.0		
Age		Mean	Median	Max	Min
	Overall	27.0	25.0	55	15
	Domestic Plotter	26.2	25.5	45	15
	Foreign Fighter	25.7	21.5	52	18
	Domestic Non-Plotter	30.1	29.0	55	16

The analysis across ISIS support types consists of a total of 135 individuals, fairly evenly distributed into Domestic Plotters (35.6 percent), Foreign Fighters (38.5 percent), and Domestic Non-Plotters (25.9 percent). Most of the ISIS individuals are U.S. born citizens (62.4 percent), with very few (3.0 percent) having illegal residency status. The sample is principally male (88.1 percent) and white (54.9), as would be expected. Finally, the average age overall is consistent

between domestic plotters and foreign fighters (26.2 years and 25.7 years, respectively), but a little higher for domestic non-plotters (30.1 years).

		N	%		
Affiliation	AQAM	69	59.0		
	ISIS	48	41.0		
	Total	117	100.0		
Resident Status	US Born	55	50.9		
	Naturalized	17	15.7		
	Legal Resident	23	21.3		
	Illegal Resident	13	12.0		
	Total	108	100.0		
Gender	Male	111	94.9		
	Female	6	5.1		
	Total	117	100.0		
Race	White	82	71.9		
	Black	28	24.6		
	Other	4	3.5		
	Total	114	100.0		
Age	Overall	Mean	Median	Min	Max
	ISIS	28.3	26.0	15	66
	AQAM	26.2	25.5	15	45
		29.8	26.0	19	66

Table 4 contains summary descriptive statistics of the ISIS-AQAM perpetrator dataset. Of the 117 perpetrators analyzed for this project, 69 (59.0 percent) are AQAM-affiliated and 48 (41 percent) are ISIS affiliated. The sample overall is generally U.S. Born (50.9 percent), with 12 percent possessing illegal U.S. residency. The perpetrator sample is comprised primarily of males (94.9 percent) with an average overall age of 28.3 years. ISIS perpetrators are, on average, younger than AQAM perpetrators in the data set, 26.2 years to 29.8 years, respectively.

Table 5: Characteristics of Incidents					
		N	%		
Affiliation	AQAM	94	64.4		
	ISIS	52	35.6		
	Total	146	100.0		
Weapon Type	Explosives	82	59.0		
	Firearms	38	27.3		
	Other	19	13.7		
	Total	139	100.0		
Target Type	Military	31	22.3		
	Government	26	18.7		
	Civilian	21	15.1		
	Business/Financial	18	12.9		
	Transportation	17	12.2		
	Other	26	18.7		
	Total	139	100.0		
Num. Offenders	1	67	46.9		
	2-3	48	33.6		
	4+	28	19.6		
	Total	143	100.0		
Success	Unsuccessful	112	76.7		
	Successful	34	23.3		
	Total	146	100.0		
Plan Cycle	Overall	Mean	Median	Min	Max
	ISIS	201.0	113.0	2.0	1159.0
	AQAM	65.8	56.0	2.0	267.0
		304.8	285.0	11.0	1159.0

Lastly, in addition to persons data, this project also includes analysis of AQAM and ISIS incidents in the United States. While the ATS database contained 570 U.S. incidents at the time of this analysis, 146 of them are designated as AQAM or ISIS affiliated. A measure of success was available for each of these incidents, therefore all 146 are included in the analysis. Table 5 contains descriptives of the incident data, which consists mainly of AQAM incidents (64.4 percent). Overall, the bulk of the incidents in the dataset involve explosives, military targets, and

small groups. Roughly one quarter (23.3 percent) of the incidents are coded as having achieved some level of success. We can also see preliminary differences between AQAM and ISIS incidents with regard to the planning cycle, with those of the AQAM incidents being, on average, longer than the ISIS incidents.

It is important to note that the values listed in Table 5 concerning the plan cycle do not include outliers of plan cycles exceeding 1200 days. The plots considered outliers are 9/11 plots with a plan cycle of 1,845 days and incidents planned by a woman named Aafia Siddiqui. She had been involved in planning multiple U.S. incidents but disappeared for a number of years before resurfacing with a copy of the plans in hand, making the plan cycle for those incidents 2,214 days. The values including the outlier plan cycles indicate an overall average plan cycle of 419 days, with a minimum of 2 days and a maximum of 2,214 days and a median of 134.5 days. The average for AQAM incidents with these outlier plan cycles is 636.8 days, with a minimum of 11 days and a maximum of 2,214 days and a median of 301 days.

Results I: Analysis Across ISIS Support Types

As shown in Table 6, hypotheses one through three are generally supported by the data. As originally hypothesized, resident status does not appear to vary significantly across support types. Regardless of support type, roughly between one half and two thirds of ISIS supporters are U.S. born, with very few having illegal residency status.

		Domestic Plotters	Foreign Fighters	Domestic Non-Plotters	Sig.	X^2
Resident Status n=133	U.S. Born	68.8	65.4	48.5	.485	5.47
	Naturalized	14.6	15.4	15.2		
	Legal Resident	14.6	17.3	30.3		
	Illegal Resident	2.1	1.9	6.1		

Table 6: ISIS Support Type Analysis (Cont.)						
		% Domestic Plotters	% Foreign Fighters	% Domestic Non-Plotters	Sig.	X²
Gender n=134	Male	93.8	94.2	70.6	.001	13.23
	Female	6.3	5.8	29.4		
Race n=133	White	57.4	46.2	64.7	.218	3.05
	Non-white	42.6	53.8	35.3		
Age n=134	Under 21	20.8	40.4	14.7	.009	17.19
	21 - 25	29.2	28.8	20.6		
	26-30	31.3	7.7	26.5		
	Over 30	18.8	23.1	38.2		

Age and gender seem to be the major points of departure between domestic plotters, foreign fighters, and domestic non-plotters. Gender is significant: while females make up roughly 6 percent of foreign fighters and domestic plotters, they comprise nearly one third of the domestic non-plotter group. While there is a significant difference in support type across age, it does not support the original hypothesis, which predicted that domestic plotters would be younger, on average, than foreign fighters. On the contrary, roughly 40 percent of foreign fighters in the sample are under the age of twenty, while only 20.8 percent of the domestic plotters fall into that age group. For the analyses, race was dichotomized into white and non-white. While not significant, non-whites comprised proportionally less of the domestic non-plotter group (35.3 percent) than domestic plotters or foreign fighters, though they make up nearly half (45.1 percent) of the ISIS sample overall.

Table 7 contains the first of the two conjunctive analyses across support types and separates the sample into domestic (domestic plotters and domestic non-plotters) and foreign supporters (foreign fighters). While the data generated 38 total unique configurations (across 135 persons), the most common demographic configuration of persons in the dataset (n=13) is a U.S. born,

white male between the ages of 20 and 25. Individuals with this demographic configuration tended to leave 46 percent of the time.

Case No.	Resident Status	Age Range	Race	Gender	% Foreign Fighter	N
1	U.S. Born	Under 20	Non-white	Male	70	10
2	U.S. Born	20 - 25	White	Male	50	10
3	U.S. Born	20 - 25	White	Male	46	13
4	U.S. Born	Over 30	White	Male	45	11
5	U.S. Born	Over 30	Non-white	Male	44	9
6	U.S. Born	Under 20	White	Male	38	8
7	Legal Resident	Under 20	Non-white	Male	33	6
8	U.S. Born	26 - 30	Non-white	Male	20	5
9	U.S. Born	26 to 30	White	Male	14	7

The individuals that most often (70 percent of the time) fall into the foreign fighter category are U.S. born, non-white individuals under the age of 20. This is likely due to a group of Somali-American youths in Minnesota who all endeavored to join ISIS abroad. U.S. born, white and non-white males between 26 and 30 years old are least likely to be coded as foreign fighters. Roughly one third of the U.S. born, white males and legal resident status, non-white males under 20 opt to leave the United States. The remaining four dominant configurations of demographic characteristics are foreign fighters between 44 percent and 50 percent of the time.

Case No.	Resident Status	Age Range	Race	Gender	% Plotter	N
1	U.S. Born	26 - 30	White	Male	100	6
2	U.S. Born	20 - 25	White	Male	86	7
3	U.S. Born	Under 20	White	Male	80	5
4	U.S. Born	Over 30	Non-White	Male	60	5
5	U.S. Born	Over 30	Non-White	Male	50	6
6	U.S. Born	20 - 25	Non-White	Male	40	5

The next support type conjunctive analysis (displayed in Table 8) shows the dominant configurations of those who choose to stay in the United States and separates them into violent (domestic plotters) and non-violent (domestic non-plotters). Notably, U.S. born, white males across all but the oldest age category are domestic plotters at least 80 percent of the time. When the age range for these same individuals is 31 and older, that percent decreases to 50. If the 31 or older U.S. born individual is non-white, however, the percent is slightly higher at 60 percent. U.S. born, non-white males between the ages of 20 and 25 years are the least likely to be domestic plotters, with 60 percent falling into the domestic non-plotter category.

Results II: Analysis of AQAM-ISIS Perpetrators and Incidents

The AQAM-ISIS analysis includes both person comparisons and incident comparisons. The Chi Square results in Table 9 below indicate significant differences between ISIS and AQAM perpetrators with regard to resident status and race. As indicated by the descriptive statistics,

Table 9: AQAM-ISIS Perpetrator Analysis					
		%		Sig.	X ²
		AQAM	ISIS		
Resident Status n=108	U.S. Born	36.7	68.8	.002	14.403
	Naturalized	16.7	14.6		
	Legal Resident	26.7	14.6		
	Illegal Resident	20.0	2.1		
Gender n=117	Male	95.7	93.8	.646	.211
	Female	4.3	6.3		
Race n=114	White	82.1	57.4	.004	8.308
	Non-white	17.9	42.6		
Age n=114	Under 21	9.1	20.8	.135	5.558
	21 - 25	33.3	29.2		
	26-30	24.2	31.3		
	Over 30	33.3	18.8		

both categories are generally male, and the proportion of ISIS male involvement is higher among the incident perpetrators than the overall ISIS sample. This is consistent with the previous analysis across ISIS support types that indicated a higher percentage of males as foreign fighters and domestic plotters than domestic non-plotters and suggests that violent plotters in both categories are more similar in gender distribution than the literature suggested.

The differences across resident status are also significant. In previous analyses of the ATS data for all AQAM individuals, the proportion of illegal residents has been roughly 5 percent, suggesting that incident perpetrators are more likely to be illegal residents than other types of supporters. The difference in ages between AQAM and ISIS perpetrators is nonsignificant, and while ISIS has a higher proportion of youth involvement (20.8 percent compared to 9.1 percent), both categories have between 40-50 percent of their perpetrators under the age of 26.

From the incident Chi Square results in Table 10, we can see that there are also significant differences between ISIS and AQAM incidents concerning the length of the planning cycle, group size, weapon types, and target types. Plan cycle has been recoded for purposes of the analysis into four categories based on quartiles of the overall data.

Table 10: AQAM-ISIS Incident Analysis					
		%			
		AQAM	ISIS	Sig.	X^2
Plan Cycle n=83	2 months or less	7.7	51.6	.000	35.410
	2-4 months	15.4	35.5		
	4 months to 1 year	36.5	12.9		
	1 year or more	40.4	0.0		
Success n=146	Unsuccessful	78.7	73.1	.440	.598
	Successful	21.3	26.9		
Num. Offenders n=143	1	47.9	44.9	.044	6.259
	2 – 3	27.7	44.9		
	4 or more	24.5	10.2		

		%			
		AQAM	ISIS	Sig.	χ^2
Weapon n=139	Explosives	69.0	42.3	.007	9.898
	Firearms	21.8	36.5		
	Other	9.2	21.2		
Target Type n=139	Military	19.4	28.3	.029	12.484
	Government	21.5	13.0		
	Civilian	10.8	23.9		
	Business/Financial	16.1	6.5		
	Transportation	16.1	4.3		
	Other	16.1	23.9		

One of the more interesting findings presented here is the lack of variation in success rates between the two groups despite variation across other incident factors. The plan cycle lengths between the two categories are markedly different and highly significant, with ISIS plan cycles being far shorter. Just over half of ISIS incidents in the sample have a plan cycle of two months or less, while over three quarters of AQAM incidents have plan cycles longer than four months. The dataset does not include any ISIS incidents with planning cycles over one year. Both ideological categories fail far more than they succeed, though ISIS incidents have a slightly higher success rate, contrary to my original hypothesis.

In addition, group size for ISIS incidents tends to be smaller, with nearly 90 percent having groups of three persons or fewer. While the bulk of AQAM incident groups are also on the smaller side, roughly one quarter have groups of four or more. As predicted, AQAM incidents include a higher percentage of explosives as the intended or utilized weapon. ISIS incidents are relatively evenly split between firearms and explosives as the weapon of choice. Finally, while I did not predict the type of difference, the results pertaining to target type are significant and indicate that ISIS incidents are proportionally more likely to have both civilian and military targets, while AQAM incidents have a proportionally higher rate of government targets.

Finally, I utilized CACC to examine success rates across the incidents in the sample. The number of successful incidents is small, therefore the number of cases in this conjunctive analysis are below the 5 case threshold utilized in the person analysis. To raise the number of cases, I did not include plan cycle in this CACC for two reasons: first, only 74 of the 146 incidents had a plan cycle measure available due to coding time constraints. Second, I ran a cross-tab analysis of incident factors against success and found plan cycle for the sample to be nonsignificant with success. Finally, I combined the target type variable into three options: Military/Government, Civilian/Business, and Transportation/Other. The results of those crosstabs are available in the attached appendix. Table 11 shows case configurations resulting in success at least 25 percent of the time.

Table 11: Incident Success CACC

Case No.	Affiliation	Target	Weapon	Num. Offenders	% Successful	N
1	ISIS	Military/Gov	Other	1	100	3
2	AQAM	Trans/Other	Firearm	1	100	4
3	ISIS	Civ/Bus	Firearm	1	100	5
4	AQAM	Civ/Bus	Explosive	4 or more	75	4
5	AQAM	Civ/Bus	Other	4 or more	67	3
6	AQAM	Military/Gov	Firearm	1	33	6
7	ISIS	Military/Gov	Firearm	1	29	7
8	AQAM	Military/Gov	Explosive	1	29	7
9	AQAM	Civ/Bus	Explosive	1	25	8

From Table 11, we can see that ISIS incidents involving one offender utilizing a firearm against a civilian/business target, ISIS incidents involving one offender utilizing some other weapon type against a military or government target, and AQAM incidents utilizing a firearm against a transportation/other type of target involving one offender are successful 100 percent of the time. While this is certainly a striking rate of success, it is important to note that only the ISIS incidents against civilian/business targets meet the 5-case threshold. AQAM incidents

involving larger groups (four or more offenders) targeting civilians/businesses with explosives also have a fairly high rate of success at 75 percent. AQAM incidents with the same group size and target but utilizing some other kind of weapon are nearly as successful, at 67 percent.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to conduct exploratory analysis of ISIS in the United States. While the scope of the analysis was somewhat limited, the results shed light on some important patterns and differences across ISIS support types and the broader American Islamic Extremist. This chapter includes further discussion of the analysis concerning two major findings: patterns across ISIS perpetrators of violence in the United States and the similarity of success rates between ISIS and AQAM incidents. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this project and suggestions for future research.

Key Conclusions

Predicting Violent Support in the United States

The first research question considered ISIS persons independent of AQAM and examined the type of individuals who engage with ISIS' ideology as domestic plotters, foreign fighters, or domestic non-plotters. The results indicated that there were significant differences across support types, particularly by gender and age group. Individuals in the age range of 20 and under comprise 40 percent of the foreign fighter sample included in this study, while nearly the same proportion (37.1 percent) of domestic non-plotters are comprised of individuals 31 and older. There are a number of potential explanations for these differences. Criminological research concerning traditional, non-terrorism related crimes and violence routinely references to the age-crime curve and gender gap in explaining certain individuals' proclivities toward violence. Older individuals may simply not be as willing to engage in violence or sacrifice stable aspects of their

lives to travel abroad to fight, and instead support the cause by recruiting or spreading propaganda.

ISIS' recruitment strategy and propaganda may also influence the way individuals engage the ideology. The group's propaganda materials rarely feature women. On the occasion that a woman is being recruited, it is in a more supportive, rather than violent, role. Essentially, women may simply not be being recruited into violence. On the other hand, ISIS projects to youthful, aspiring men the romanticized image of a brave fighter.

The goal of the analysis was to examine the immediate threat to the United States that a person poses. Based on the analysis here, white, U.S. born males younger than thirty but older than twenty comprise the group with the greatest likelihood of perpetrating a violent domestic incident. The ability to predict whether someone will engage in domestic terrorism would be important to law enforcement; investigation strategies and precautions may be different if investigators believe an individual may leave the country or could be plotting an incident. Understanding the types of individuals who plot domestically could logically help guide resources in more efficient and effective directions, increasing law enforcement's preventative capability.

ISIS as a Uniquely Domestic Threat

Another important finding from the analyses presented here is the proportion of ISIS supporters generally and ISIS domestic plot perpetrators who are U.S. born – 62.4 percent and 68.8 percent, respectively. By comparison, only 36.7 percent of AQAM perpetrators in the sample are U.S. born. These differences may have important implications for law enforcement and immigration policy. The characterization of terrorists categorized as Islamic Extremist in the

United States as foreigners potentially in the country illegally does not appear to carry with regard to ISIS. Resident type was nonsignificant in the analysis across ISIS support types. Only the domestic non-plotter category involved more than half non-U.S. born individuals.

This is not to suggest law enforcement should focus its efforts solely on U.S. born individuals who express support for ISIS. While ISIS' strategy in the United States, as previously discussed, has not been marked by sending individuals directly connected to the central group to the United States, this could potentially change as ISIS continues to lose territory abroad.

Success Rates and Incident Configurations

The incident level analysis revealed several statistically significant differences between AQAM and ISIS incidents. Despite differences in the length of the planning cycle, weapon types, target types, and group size, the analysis indicated very similar success rates. Though ISIS incidents have a slightly higher proportion of success compared to AQAM incidents (26.9 percent compared to 21.3 percent), the difference was nonsignificant.

Logically, each of these plot factors can influence success rates. The difference in plan cycle also suggests differences in the planning process preceding ISIS and AQAM incidents. Plots based around different weapon or target types may require different preparatory behaviors and subsequently result in a higher likelihood of failure. For example, differences in target types may result in more visible preparatory activities. A perpetrator may have a more difficult time conducting surveillance on a military target (which would presumably have heightened security) versus a public place, such as a park. Differences in success rate across weapon types may be due to the feasibility and accessibility of certain weapons. ISIS incidents seem to be characterized by plot configurations that predict higher success rates: plots involving 1 offender,

utilize firearms or explosives, and target civilians. This is concerning as it may indicate that ISIS plots have the potential to be increase in success rate.

Limitations and Future Research

While this project expanded on previous research, it is certainly not without limitations. The subject matter itself creates inherent restrictions. Terrorism is a rare occurrence to begin with, and limiting it to one ideological category (Islamic Extremism) and halving that category within itself lends small sample sizes. With limited existing literature, analysis is also limited to an exploratory role at this phase to guide further academic research and quantitative analysis.

In addition, ISIS is a very contemporary phenomenon. The most recent incident included in the analysis occurred mere weeks before the project was completed, and with such a relatively small pool of individuals and incidents available, the data is subject to rapid change with each new case. While there are also clear differences in the types of attacks and persons characterized as being AQAM versus ISIS, the most important determinant may simply be the year the individual radicalized. ISIS is, for lack of a better term, the current “big man on campus.” It is a social media savvy organization, selling a glorified image of violence and war that appears to appeal to a different type of person than those attracted to AQAM. Individuals with a proclivity to Islamic extremism would be hard-pressed to explore the ideology without coming into contact with the group’s materials or influence.

In light of the threat posed by ISIS, understanding how the group manifests in the United States is paramount to prevention. This study identified some key points of departure across ISIS supporters as well as between AQAM and ISIS supporters and incidents. Age and gender seem to be strong indicators of whether or not an individual will engage or plan to engage in domestic

terrorism, and ISIS perpetrators appear to be different than their AQAM counterparts largely in resident status and race.

When considering violent incidents in the United States, the analysis indicates that the threat posed by ISIS is also measurably different: ISIS incidents involve shorter planning cycles, fewer persons, a higher proportion of potentially readily accessible weapons (firearms), and a greater tendency toward civilian targets. While these configurations appear to be more successful than others, ISIS does not appear to be more successful than AQAM at perpetrating violence in the United States. Future research should focus on exploring these differences to help paint a more accurate picture and examine how law enforcement has been relatively consistent in foiling plots despite the changing nature of the Islamic Extremist threat.

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Appendix 1: Incident Success Chi Square Analysis

Incident Success Chi Square Analysis					
		Unsuccessful	Successful	Sig.	X^2
Plan Cycle N=83	2 months or less	20.3	36.8	.219	4.423
	2-4 months	21.9	26.3		
	4 months to 1 year	32.8	10.5		
	1 year or more	25.0	26.3		
Num. Offenders N=143	1	39.4	70.6	.001	13.522
	2 – 3	41.3	8.8		
	4 or more	19.3	20.6		
Weapon N=139	Explosives	69.5	26.5	.000	22.717
	Firearms	22.9	41.2		
	Other	7.6	32.4		
Target Type N=139	Military	23.8	17.6	.001	20.783
	Government	21.0	11.8		
	Civilian	7.6	38.2		
	Business/Financial	13.3	11.8		
	Transportation	15.2	2.9		
	Other	19.0	17.6		