

Islamic Radicalization Index: Minnesota

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ABSTRACT

The Somali community of Minnesota is the largest Somali community outside of Somalia, and has been the victim of extreme Islamic radicalization. Minnesota has produced more foreign fighters than any other state in the United States. This paper will endeavor to explore the challenges unique to combating recruitment within the Somali community. The paper will begin by outlining the history of Muslims and Somalis in Minnesota then summarize what makes them such a unique case when dealing with radicalization. After providing background about al-Shabaab and the Islamic State, the paper will then look at what is being done by the U.S. government as well as the local Somali community to combat extremism. Finally, various case studies will be explored, and a detailed outline of all documented cases of Minnesotans who have travelled to be Jihadists abroad will be provided. The ultimate goal of this paper is to shed light on why Minnesota has been so vulnerable to jihadi recruitment and what can be done to prevent it in the near future.

**The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

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Introduction

This paper explores the wide array of challenges within the Somali American community in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota. The main issue that this paper will focus on is why recruitment for terrorist entities such as al-Shabaab and the Islamic State has been more successful with recruitment from the Somali population in Minnesota, than any other state, or demographic in the United States.

The paper begins by looking at both the history of Islam and Somalis in Minnesota and the unique challenges they face. It will then outline both al-Shabaab and the Islamic State in terms of their structure, territory, influence and the threat that each organization poses to the United States; both domestically, as well as internationally. The paper will then explore what is being done in the Twin Cities in order to stop the continued radicalization of Somali youth. Finally, three separate case studies, each with a different significance will be explored, followed by a chart comprising of all the (available) information about recruits to both the Islamic State and al-Shabaab from Minnesota. The case studies are meant to provide a more in depth look into specific cases, exploring the economic, educational and religious backgrounds of the foreign fighters as well as explore the various factors that contributed to their radicalization.

Although foreign fighters of terrorist groups have come from various cities in the United States¹, the majority have come from Minnesota. The challenges that Somali migrants face upon arrival to the United States, whether it be classification into social and ethnic groups or assimilation issues, make them prime candidates for terrorist recruitment. Government involvement has tended to aggravate the relations and erode the trust between the Somali community and the American government. Even though the government claims they are investing what they believe is enough resources to combat recruitment within the Somali community, they are not doing a

¹ START, *Understanding the Threat: What Data Tell Us about U.S. Foreign Fighters*, (START: National Consortium for The Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism, September 2015).

good enough job as people from the Somali community are continuing to join terrorist organizations.²

² Healy, Jack, *For Jihad Recruits, a Pipeline from Minnesota to Militancy*, (New York Times, September 07, 2014).

Somali Muslim History in the Twin Cities and the United States

To fully understand why so many people decide to make *Hijrah*³ to Somalia or other countries, it is important to look at the history of the Somali migrants to the United States as well as their respective history, culture and religious practices.

Minnesota, a state comprised of numerous immigrants, has a recorded presence of Muslim residents dating back as far as the 1880's.⁴ Minnesota's Muslim population represents different ethnic as well as national backgrounds.⁵

Somali immigration to the US has grown astronomically over the past few decades, as illustrated in figure 1 below.⁶

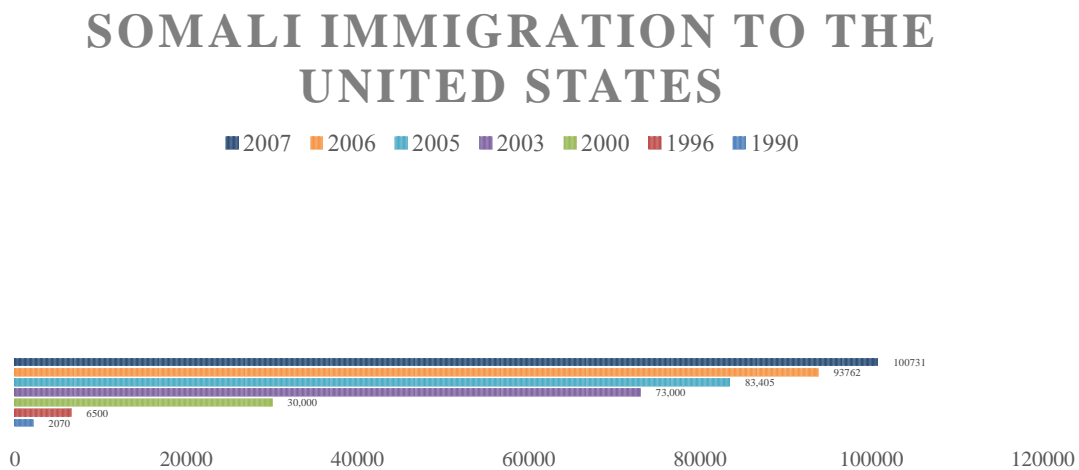


Figure 1

Although the numbers displayed in figure 1 indicate that the Somali population of the United States in 2000 is 30,000, a report from a Somali organization operating

³ *The process of moving to the caliphate*

⁴ Holmquist, June Drenning, *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981).

⁵ Siddiqui, Zafar, *The Muslim Experience in Minnesota*, (Star Tribune. July 19, 2011).

⁶ Healy, Jack, *For Jihad Recruits*.

within the United States estimated that in 2002, the Somali population was over 200,000.⁷ This significant immigration is a result of the ongoing civil war in Somalia.⁸

The Somali community in the United States and specifically, in Minnesota is one of the most complex immigrant groups to date. As such, Somali refugees are described as “one of the most unique sets of newcomers to ever enter this nation.”⁹ Somalia, a country that has not seen government structure or any form of stability in the past few decades has an increasingly confusing and complex tribal clan culture that sets them apart from other refugees arriving to the United States. All of these attributes make the Somali community an especially difficult group for Homeland Security to deal with, in terms of outreach and cooperation within their community.¹⁰

As a result, there is a need for new policy that will attempt to better understand the Somali community and the factors that make them so vulnerable to extremist recruitment. There are several factors that contribute to what makes the Somali community so unique, and as such, a new approach must be taken only after fully understanding these contributing factors. Their history, religion, social structure and most importantly, their integrative characteristics (or lack thereof) are some of the elements that those wishing to interact with the Somali community must understand before doing so.¹¹

One of the most perplexing aspects of Somali culture is clanism. In anthropological terms, a clan could be described as “the principal social unit of tribal organization, in which descent is reckoned exclusively in either the paternal or the maternal line”.¹² Seeing as North American society does not use a clan system, grasping this concept has proven to be a struggle for outsiders.

⁷ Mulligan, Scott, *Radicalization Within the Somali-American Diaspora: Countering the Homegrown Terrorist Threat*, (Naval Postgraduate School Library, December, 2009).

⁸ AlJazeeraEnglish, *The Rageh Omaar Report - From Minneapolis to Mogadishu*, (YouTube, July 15, 2010).

⁹ Mulligan, Scott, *Radicalization Within the Somali-American Diaspora*.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Lewis, I. M, *Visible and Invisible Differences: The Somali Paradox*, (Africa: Journal of the International African Institute 74, 2004).

¹² *The Definition of Clan*, (Dictionary.com, nd).

The Somali Clan system is still dominant in Somalia and within Somali communities within the diaspora.¹³ The majority of the Somali population is divided into six different clans, which divides them culturally. It should be noted that religiously, over 99% of Somalia is Sunni Muslim.¹⁴ The Somali people use the clan system for implementing social order and general governance in a given area. Furthermore, the *sharia courts* are a function of the clan system making it an integral part of Somali society.¹⁵

The clan divide within the twin cities specifically, is not as visible due to the high population density, as well as the high-rise apartment complexes in an area of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhoods heavily populated with Somali immigrants known as Little Mogadishu (see map below).¹⁶ However, the clan system could prove to be a contributing factor to jihadi recruitment, based on the idea that external pressure generally delivers a unifying response within a clan. This could influence negative responses to American involvement in Somali affairs, which could then be used as a motivating tool to recruit foreign fighters.

In addition to the clan system, ongoing conflict in their homeland has negatively impacted basic necessities such as literacy, where in 2006 it was discovered that 20% of the Somali population was illiterate. It was also noted that the younger Somali community did not only have a difficult time grasping the English language, but even struggled with their native Somali dialect. Having such a high illiteracy rate is a direct result of the extreme poverty that is evident in the Somali community.¹⁷

A 2007 United States census estimated that 51 percent of the Somali American population was living below the poverty line, where the average household's income was \$21,461 compared to the state average, \$61,173. This ranks the Somali

¹³ Mulligan, Scott, *Radicalization Within the Somali-American Diaspora*.

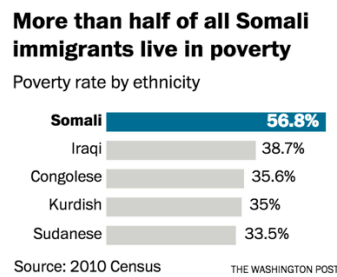
¹⁴ Lewis, I. M, *Visible and Invisible Differences*.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Mulligan, Scott, *Radicalization Within the Somali-American Diaspora*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

population as one of the poorest immigrant populations existing in the United States.¹⁸ In 2014, Secretary of State, John Kerry claimed that “We have a huge common interest in dealing with this issue of poverty, which in many cases is the root cause of terrorism or even the root cause of the disenfranchisement of millions of people on this planet.”¹⁹ While it is difficult to say that poverty is a contributing factor to radicalization in general, based on the research of the Somali population, it may not be so easy to discredit poverty as a possible factor in radicalization.²⁰



(Figure 2)²¹

In Figure 3 below it is possible to see where the majority of the Somali community is centralized in the twin cities.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Sterman, David, *Don't Dismiss Poverty's Role in Terrorism Yet*, (Time, February 4, 2015).

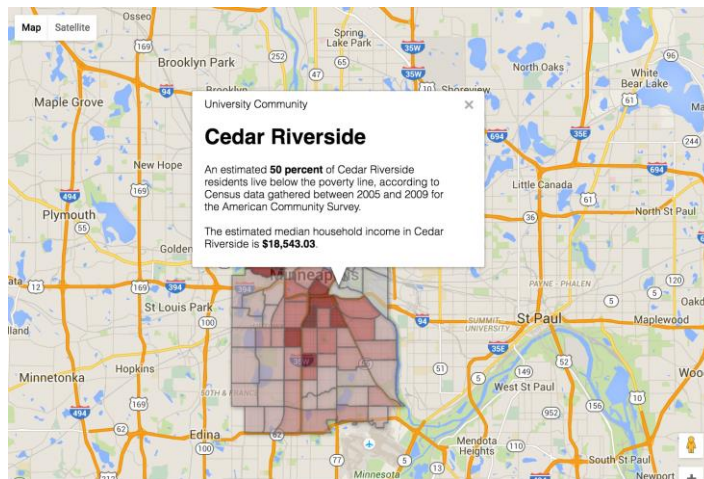
²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Harlan, Chico, *Why a Somali Refugee Wants to Escape Kansas*, (Washington Post. May 24, 2016).



(Figure 3)²²

Below, in figure four is a map displaying the poverty levels within the Twin Cities. Cedar-Riverside, also referred to as Little Mogadishu, is the most impoverished area of the city.



(Figure 4)²³

²² Cook, Jim, *Is the Little Mogadishu Really the Epicenter of Crime in Minneapolis? Crime Reports Say Absolutely Not*, (Irregular Times, December 07, 2015).

²³ Severns Guntzel, Jeff, *Minneapolis Residents Living below the Poverty Line*, (MinnPost. November 19, 2011).

A contributing factor to assimilation difficulties could be attributed to the concept of social classification; consequently, Somali immigrants feel as if they are being classified solely by their race. This is in contrast to their clan classification, as well as their religion, which is the customary way in which Somalis organize themselves and view themselves.²⁴ Being classified outside of what they prefer could be a contributing factor to friction between immigrants and the host nations. In fact, a 2009 study discusses how African immigrants reacted when being labeled simply as black rather than their usual social classifications²⁵; consequently, there was a strengthening of nationalist and religious identity in the attempt to differentiate themselves from the rest of the African-American community.²⁶

A study looking at the Somali population in Canada discovered that Somali women choose to wear the hijab despite the fact that Somali women “do not simply wear the hijab culturally.”²⁷ In the same study, they concluded that immigrants become more nationalistic and religious in order to distinguish themselves from ethnic classifications that they do not agree with.²⁸ This displays the difficulties that many immigrants have with assimilation. Somali women choosing to wear the hijab as a statement shows that they struggle to accept that many people do not see them as Somali Muslims, but more as just African-American citizens.

Assimilation struggles are evident in the push and pull factors felt by second and third generation Somali immigrants. The second and third generation Somali immigrants feel the need to please their parents, retaining Somali culture and identity. However, at the same time they are actively trying to assimilate into American society.²⁹ One Somali girl said that her experience in the United States is like, “living like a turtle: you have to learn to live on both the land and the water, at home and at school”.³⁰ This exemplifies the difficulties in which Somali youth face in the United

²⁴ Mulligan, Scott, *Radicalization Within the Somali-American Diaspora*.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

States, on the one hand trying to impress their parents by retaining their customs, while on the other striving to fit in with other Americans their age.

It is possible to conclude that some of the contributing factors that make resettlement in the United States difficult for Somalis include: a) Lack of proficient English and b) the difficulties with assimilation into American society that they encountered upon arriving in the United States.

The push and pull factors Somali youth in the United States must navigate as they find their identity in a new country, may be a reason as to why so many of Somali youth choose to take the path of *jihād*. All of these factors are what make them such prime candidates as targets of jihadi recruiters, because with all of the stress placed on them, they are looking for an escape, in this case, jihad. Jihad, “offer(s) them an identity that transcends these two competing worlds in favor of an exciting and seemingly meaningful identity of jihadist”.³¹

³¹ Sageman, Marc, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

Al-Shabaab

Harak al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin more commonly referred to as simply *al-Shabaab*, (“the youth” in English), is the military wing of the now disbanded Union of Islamic Courts, who had brief control over the capital of Somalia, Mogadishu, in 2006 in addition a significant portion of the southern region of the country.³² The group later withdrew control over most of the territory of which they governed in 2007, after they were defeated by the Somali government and Ethiopian forces.³³

Although al-Shabaab does not control as much territory in Somalia as they once did, the group continues to remain a formidable threat in the region.³⁴ Since 2007 al-Shabaab has exerted transient and occasionally permanent control over strategic areas in Somalia, most notably, Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia.³⁵ In 2008, the United States of America designated al-Shabaab a Foreign Terrorist Organization under section 219 of the immigration and nationality act.³⁶ In 2014 it was estimated that al-Shabaab had between 7000-9000 fighters.³⁷ One of the most notable events in al-Shabaab’s history occurred in 2012 when al-Shabaab’s leader at the time, Mukhtar Abu al-Zubair pledged allegiance to al-Qai’da leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. Al-Shabaab posted an audio clip to their website with direct messages to al-Zawahiri referring to him as “my dear commander and kind sheikh” and making statements implying that al-Shabaab would “...march with you as loyal soldiers”.³⁸ They continued by saying: “On behalf of the soldiers and the commanders in al-Shabaab, we pledge allegiance to you. So lead us to the path of Jihad and martyrdom that was drawn by our imam, the martyr Osama”.³⁹

³² BBC Staff, *Who Are Somalia’s Al-Shabaab*, (BBC News, December 09, 2016).

³³ National Counterterrorism Center, *Al Shabaab*, nd.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Reuters, *UPDATE 3-Somali Government Declares Islamist Rebellion Defeated | Agricultural Commodities | Reuters*, (Reuters, August 06, 2011).

³⁶ National Counterterrorism Center, *Al Shabaab*.

³⁷ Chiaramonte, Perry, *Jihadist Groups across Globe Vying for Terror Spotlight*, (Fox News, July 10, 2014).

³⁸ CNN Wire Staff, *Al-Shabaab Joining Al Qaeda, Monitor Group Says*, (CNN, February 10, 2012).

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Ayman al-Zawahiri was appointed leader of al-Qai'da after the death of his predecessor Osama Bin Laden.⁴⁰ Al-Zawahiri, who is considered to have played a significant role in the 9/11 attacks⁴¹, responded to the al-Shabaab message saying, “that will delight the believers and annoy the crusaders” as well as “the Arab region is slipping from America’s grip”.⁴²

Up until 2010, al-Shabaab’s activity exclusively remained inside of the borders of Somalia, however in 2010, al-Shabaab expanded operations into neighboring countries. On July 11th 2010, al-Shabaab executed a twin suicide bombing attack in Uganda that claimed the lives of more than 70 people.⁴³ In June of 2013 al-Shabaab attacked a United Nations compound in the Somali capital of Mogadishu, which left 22 people dead. To this day the most notable attack that al-Shabaab has carried out was on September 21, 2013 at the Westgate Shopping Center in Nairobi, Kenya. The Westgate Mall, often frequented by tourists was attacked by a group of al-Shabaab militants in a four-day siege which left at least 67 people dead.⁴⁴

Currently al-Shabaab’s influence in Somalia and neighboring countries has decreased significantly with the organization losing control over the more strategic areas within Somalia.⁴⁵ It is estimated that al-Shabaab has retreated from 20 towns in Somalia of which they previously controlled.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ BBC News Staff, *Ayman Al-Zawahiri Appointed as Al-Qaeda Leader*, (BBC News, June 16, 2011).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² CNN Wire Staff, *Al-Shabaab Joining Al Qaeda*.

⁴³ NCTC, *Al Shabaab*, nd.

⁴⁴ Stewart, Catrina, *Nairobi Westgate Mall Attack: Shopping Centre Re-opens Two Years after Terror Siege Where Al-Shabaab Killed 67 People*, (The Independent, July 14, 2015).

⁴⁵ NCTC, *Al Shabaab*, nd.

⁴⁶ VOA Staff, *UN Points to Progress in Battling Al-Shabab in Somalia*, (VOA, January 3, 2015).

Al-Shabaab as a Threat to the United States

Al-Shabaab arguably has never been a significant domestic threat to the United States.⁴⁷ According to experts, al-Shabaab has shown “scant” ability to conduct operations outside of Somalia.⁴⁸ In 2015, al-Shabaab released a video calling for an attack on the Mall of America, however, it was determined by U.S. authorities that there was “no credible threat” from the claims, and that al-Shabaab did not have the capability to carry out an attack of that magnitude on American soil.⁴⁹ Although experts are skeptical of al-Shabaab’s abilities to carry out attacks, their incredible ability to recruit foreign fighters should not be overlooked.⁵⁰ In fact, the only operation that al-Shabaab has conducted outside of Africa was in 2010, where a Somali man, who allegedly was connected to al-Shabaab, attempted to murder Danish cartoonist, Kurt Westergaard with an axe.⁵¹

With the rise of the Islamic State, combined with the number of militants that have travelled to join al-Shabaab, there is growing fear that these travelers could return to the United States or encourage others to carry out attacks within the United States itself.⁵²

A United States House Committee on Homeland Security claimed that none of the people who travelled to join al-Shabaab had any intention of returning to the United States to carry out an attack (survey of more than 250 jihadist cases since the attacks on 9/11).⁵³ Although the FBI does not believe that al-Shabaab has shown any capability of carrying out terrorist attacks in the West, the fear of the “lone wolf” style attack is always a concern.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Bergen, Peter, *How Big of A Threat is Al-Shabaab To The United States?*, (CNN, February 22, 2015).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ FOX News, *Al Shabaab Calls for Attack on Mall of America in New Video*, (Fox News, February 23, 2015).

⁵⁰ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*, (Anti-Defamation League, February 2015).

⁵¹ Bergen, Peter, *How Big of A Threat is Al-Shabaab To The United States*.

⁵² Sen, Ashish Kumar, Robert W. Merry, Benjamin Weinthal, and Dave Majumdar, *Al-Shabaab Threatens U.S. Attacks: Should You Be Worried?*, (The National Interest, February 25, 2015).

⁵³ Bergen, Peter, *How Big of A Threat is Al-Shabaab To The United States*.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

As a way of preventing people travelling outside of the United States for extremist purposes, the FBI has made the issue one of the “highest priorities in anti-terrorism”.⁵⁵ Although the Islamic State has replaced al-Shabaab as the “terror group of choice” for foreign jihadi’s, there are still reports of people attempting to join al-Shabaab.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ ADL, *The ISIS Impact on the Domestic Islamic Extremist Threat: Homegrown Islamic Extremism 2009-2015*, (Anti-Defamation League, March 11, 2016).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Dae'sh (Islamic State)

The Islamic State, also known by ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) or by its Arabic name, Dae'sh, is a Sunni Jihadist organization that follows the Salafi ideology.⁵⁷ In June 2014 Dae'sh established a worldwide Caliphate, led by the Caliph, Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim al-Badri al-Samarrai better known by Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi.⁵⁸

After declaring the Caliphate, the organization demanded that Muslims worldwide pledge allegiance to the caliph, as well as migrate to the territory that Dae'sh controls. In addition, Daesh demanded that all other jihadist organization recognize and respect their authority, of which many have.⁵⁹ It is estimated that the area Dae'sh controls contains a population ranging from 2.8 to 8 million people.⁶⁰

The history of the organization dates back to the 2003 American led invasion of Iraq. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian national, pledged allegiance to Usama Bin Laden and formed al-Qaeda in Iraq.⁶¹ After Zarqawi's death in 2006, the Iraqi faction of al-Qaeda established an umbrella organization, the Islamic State of Iraq.⁶² While some accepted the idea of the caliphate, many criticized the organization for deviating from the main concern of fighting the Americans.⁶³

In the next four years the presence and control of the ISI dwindled due to American presence and targeted strikes by the American and Iraqi forces. However, between 2010 and 2013 the organization restructured itself and took advantage of the neighboring civil war in Syria.⁶⁴ In 2013 the leader of the organization Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, announced the merging of his forces in Iraq and Syria and the creation of

⁵⁷ Tharoor, Ishaan, *ISIS or ISIL? The Debate over What to Call Iraq's Terror Group*, (Washington Post, June 18, 2014).

⁵⁸ BBC Staff, *What is 'Islamic State'*, (BBC News, December 2, 2015).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Birke, Sarah, *How ISIS Rules*, (The New York Review of Books, February 5, 2015).

⁶¹ BBC Staff, *What is 'Islamic State'*.

⁶² Hashim, Ahmed S, *The Islamic State: From Al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate*, (Middle East Policy Council, 2014).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ *Islamic State (IS)*, (Abington: Helicon, 2016).

ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant).⁶⁵ In December 2014 Dae'sh was designated by the United States as a terrorist organization.⁶⁶

The most significant turning point for the organization was the capture of Mosul, a large city in Northern Iraq, in June of 2014.⁶⁷ An estimated 800 Dae'sh militants captured the city from approximately 30,000 Iraqi soldiers, showing the world that ISIL was a force to be reckoned with.⁶⁸

After their occupation of Mosul, Dae'sh's influence has only grown. Dae'sh has successfully carried out attacks all over Europe and North America, sparking a United States led coalition battle against the terrorist group.⁶⁹ Their incredible ability to carry out attacks across the globe has helped prove Dae'sh as a prominent organization in the Salafi-Jihadist community; consequently, Dae'sh gained the support of several other organizations giving them a much larger presence than they once had.⁷⁰ In 2014, it was estimated by an Iraqi intelligence officer that Daesh had over 100,000 fighters⁷¹, including almost a third of which who are classified as foreign fighters.⁷² The Central Intelligence Agency however, believes that Dae'sh's fighter population is between 21,000-31,500, making the number of foreign fighters much smaller.⁷³

The early success of Dae'sh in Iraq and Syria lead those in the jihadist world to believe that the impact of Dae'sh would be more significant than that of al-Qaeda and its affiliates, such as al-Shabab.⁷⁴ While al-Qaeda's primary goal is to use violence in

⁶⁵ BBC Staff, *What is 'Islamic State'*.

⁶⁶ *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, (U.S. Department of State, nd).

⁶⁷ BBC Staff, *What is 'Islamic State'*.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ AFP, *Coalition Commanders Seek Plan to Counter Daesh Advance*, (Gulf News, October 14, 2014).

⁷⁰ Fox News, *Boko Haram Swears Formal Allegiance to ISIS*, (Fox News, March 8, 2015).

⁷¹ RT Staff, *ISIS Has 100,000 Fighters, Growing Fast - Iraqi Govt Adviser*, (RT International, August 27, 2014).

⁷² *Islamic State (IS)*, (Abington: Helicon, 2016).

⁷³ AFP, *IS Has 20,000-31,500 Fighters in Iraq and Syria: CIA* (Yahoo, September 11, 2014).

⁷⁴ Byman, Daniel, *Comparing Al Qaeda and ISIS: Different goals, different targets*, (Brookings, April 29, 2015).

order to “electrify the Muslim world”⁷⁵, Dae’sh’s primary purpose is to control territory, gaining more territory and influence over time.⁷⁶

Through their graphic postings of beheadings, crucifixions and burning of people on their various social media platforms, Dae’sh set itself apart from other extremist groups; consequently, it helped attract more foreign recruits, especially younger foreigners due to the use of social media.⁷⁷ Al-Qaeda however took a different approach; their methodology was more of people-centered approach, valuing public support more than control of territory.⁷⁸

As shown later in the list of documented cases, while al-Shabaab was more efficacious in recruiting foreigners initially, in the past five years Dae’sh has been far more successful in recruiting foreigners, including Somali’s. While there was no direct conflict between the two organizations over recruitment, it is possible to assume that Dae’sh’s more extreme approach spoke to foreign youth and those wishing to fight jihad more so than al-Qaeda and its affiliates approach of a more people centered approach.⁷⁹

The organization is currently the world’s most heavily funded terrorist organization, with over two-billion dollars in assets through alleged support from some Gulf States, as well as revenue from conquered towns and the oil fields in captured territory.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Tamming, Tore, *The al-Qaeda-Islamic State Rivalry: Competition Yes, but No Competitive Escalation* (July 11, 2017)

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ *Islamic State (IS)*, (Abington: Helicon, 2016).

The Islamic State as a Threat to the United States

Daesh has proven itself to be a significant threat to the United States both domestically as well as internationally. Their remarkable ability to recruit Americans to join the Salafi movement as well as their capability to carry out attacks on American soil has made the battle against Daesh, an American priority.⁸¹

Daesh, like al-Shabaab, have been able to recruit Americans through the use of online propaganda. It is estimated that as of early 2015, Daesh had recruited over 20,000 foreign fighters, surpassing every other conflict in the past that had recruited foreign fighters.⁸² Between March 2014 and November 2015, 82 individuals in the United States were charged for being affiliated with Daesh as well as over 250 individuals either joining or attempting to join the organization.⁸³ Additionally, in November of 2015 it was reported that United States Law Enforcement had over 1,000 active Daesh probes within the country, proving the significance of the threat.⁸⁴

This has baffled American government agencies and has made them all reconsider the strategies they use in order to stop American citizens and resident from leaving to join jihadist causes.⁸⁵

Between 2014 and late 2016, there were four attacks on American soil that can all be linked to Daesh.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Comey, James B, *FBI Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2016*, (FBI, November 30, 2014).

⁸² Neumann, Peter R, *Foreign Fighter Total in Syria/Iraq Now Exceeds 20,000; Surpasses Afghanistan Conflict in the 1980s / ICSR*, (ICSR, January 26, 2015).

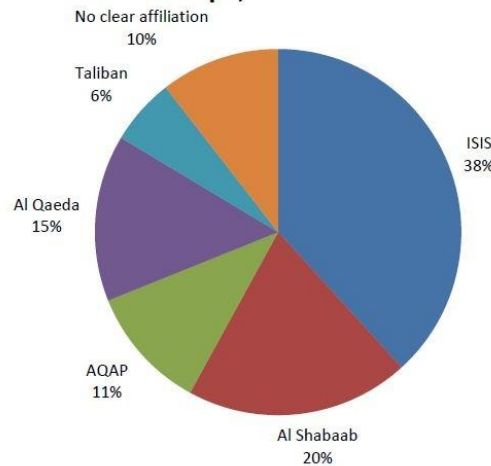
⁸³ Gorka, Dr. Sebastian L., and Katharine C. Gorka, *ISIS: The Threat to the United States*, (Threat Knowledge Group, November 2015).

⁸⁴ *FBI Has Nearly 1,000 Active ISIS Probes Inside U.S. - Judicial Watch*, (Judicial Watch, November 13, 2015).

⁸⁵ Diamond, Jeremy, *Congress Report: U.S. 'failed' to Stop Foreign Fighters*, (CNN, September 30, 2015).

⁸⁶ Yourish, Karen, Derek Watkins, and Tom Giratikanon, *Where ISIS Has Directed and Inspired Attacks Around the World*, (The New York Times, June 16, 2015).

Domestic Islamic Extremist Affiliations with Major Groups, 2009 - 2015



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As displayed in the figure above published by the Anti-Defamation League, Daesh is responsible for almost 40 percent for domestic affiliation with major Islamic terror groups. What makes that number significant is that in 2015, the number of Americans affiliated with terror organizations was up 180% from 2014, indicating that Daesh in fact currently holds a larger percentage of what is indicated on the chart.⁸⁸

The continued fear of attacks on American soil remains a top priority for law enforcement, as does the fear of more Americans travelling to Iraq and Syria to join the terrorist organization.

In September 2016, Minnesota became the target, for the first time, of an attack committed by the Islamic State.⁸⁹ On September 17, 2016, Dair Ahmed Adan, a computer science student who arrived in the United States when he was three months old, stabbed nine people at the Crossroads Center Mall in St. Cloud Minnesota, a city located 60 miles from St. Paul.⁹⁰ Adan was ultimately stopped by an off-duty police

⁸⁷ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Allen, Nick, *Dahir Adan, the Somali Computer Student Who Stabbed Nine in Minnesota Mall*, (The Telegraph, September, 19, 2016).

⁹⁰ Ibid.

officer who shot and killed him. Almost immediately after the attack, Daesh claimed responsibility, citing that Adan was one of the organization’s “soldiers.”⁹¹

What makes Adan’s case so puzzling is his background does not shed light onto his motivation for carrying out the attack. Generally speaking, those who are willing to carry out these attacks seem to be heavily invested in their religion, placing Islam at a higher importance than other facets of their lives.⁹² Furthermore, having difficulty assimilating into American society is often cited as a catalyzing factor in radicalization. According to friends and leaders in the Somali community, Adan was more interested in sports than religion, and was “the most assimilated kid in the neighborhood”.⁹³

Following the attack, Rick Thornton, special agent for the FBI in Minnesota, said that they would look into Adan’s social media accounts as well as his electronic devices in the hopes of shedding light onto how Adan became radicalized and how to prevent events like these from occurring in the future.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Comerford, Nadine & Smith, Alex, *Dahir Ahmed Named by Police as St. Cloud, Minnesota, Stabbing Suspect*, (NBC New, September 20, 2016).

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Stahl, Brandon, Dupuy, Beatrice & Walsh, Paul, *Family ID’s Attacker behind potential Act of Terrorism in St. Cloud*, (Star Tribune, September 19, 2016).

How Are Terrorists Recruiting Minnesotans?

The question of how terrorist organizations like al-Shabaab and the Islamic State are recruiting Americans to join their *jihad*, is as controversial as it is complex. Most experts will simply argue that all of the fighters are being recruited online, however, there are some that will claim that mosques play a significant role in the recruitment process.

As well as being the largest mosque in the area, Abu-Bakr al-Saddique Islamic Center serves as a gathering place for the Somali community of the Twin Cities.⁹⁵ The Islamic center aims to settle new immigrants as well as to help them integrate into American society. However, some experts claim that the mosque has played a role in the recruitment of many of the youth that have travelled to Somalia as well as Syria.⁹⁶ Abdirizak Bihi, the Director of the Somali Education and Social Advocacy Center, whose nephew was recruited by al-Shabaab, has very strong criticisms of the Islamic Center as well as its preachers. “It would happen all the time at the Convention Center, the Minneapolis convention center. Imam’s would call the community for jihad...they will ask young people to go fight, that was common”.⁹⁷ “There is one mosque that was leading this charge, that is the mosque called Abubakar as-Saddique mosque. All the missing, all the indicted and all those who have been sentenced to jail here, who are in jail now, including the janitor of that mosque, are all from the same mosque, out of fourty mosques in the area”⁹⁸

The claim that Bihi is making is significant, claiming that all Minnesotans who travelled abroad as jihadist fighters had ties to this mosque. The janitor that Bihi refers to, Mahamud Said Omar, was found guilty in October 2012 of five charges related to his recruitment of youth for al-Shabaab.⁹⁹ Omar was found guilty for providing monetary support for youth wishing to join al-Shabaab and is currently serving a 20-year sentence as a result of his role in the recruitment of Minnesotan youth.

⁹⁵ AlJazeeraEnglish, *The Rageh Omaar Report - From Minneapolis to Mogadishu*, (YouTube, July 15, 2010).

⁹⁶ Shwartz, Sharona, ‘*The Real Disneyland*’: *New Video Tries to recruit Somali-Americans in Minnesota for Jihad*, (*TheBlaze*, August 11, 2013).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

After Omar's role was uncovered, the Department of Justice conducted an investigation of the mosque. It concluded that none of the mosque's leadership was involved in the recruitment process.¹⁰⁰ However, Abdirizak Bihi claims that whether or not the leadership from the mosque is found guilty or not shouldn't matter. "It will not stop, they will change the venue, they do not preach in the mosque anymore the venue always changes. Al-Shabaab is an entity like al-Qaeda that can change overnight"¹⁰¹ Although those affiliated with the mosque were not found guilty, Bihi's claims make one believe that there could be a connection between the leadership in some of the religious centers and radicalization.

Confronting the leadership in the mosques with the idea that they are aiding those who wish to join the global jihad movement, is highly sensitive and controversial. Cooperation and trust between government officials and religious figureheads as well as other important figures within the Somali community is essential; consequently, the FBI and other government agencies are very conscious as to how they must approach this issue. An Al-Jazeera report in 2010 claimed that after an FBI crackdown on foreign fighters in the community, the Somali public of Minnesota withdrew cooperation with authorities.¹⁰² This poses a significant problem, for without cooperation, it is seemingly impossible to stop the radicalization and travelling of jihadi fighters. Authorities must find common ground with the religious leaders in the community in the hopes of building a relationship in which the authorities can rely on the religious leaders for cooperation and the religious leader can trust the authorities to keep their communities safe, without infringing on their privacy.

The more well-known aspect of recruitment is the online recruitment of jihadi terrorist networks. Both al-Shabaab as well as the Islamic State have extensive online recruitment networks that have proven to be more than effective.

¹⁰⁰ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

¹⁰¹ Shwartz, Sharona, *'The Real Disneyland'*.

¹⁰² AlJazeeraEnglish, *The Rageh Omaar Report*.

FBI special agent E.K. Wilson believes that internet material is “a big recruiting tool attracting young men to fight”.¹⁰³ Agent Wilson believes that the radicalization process has revolutionized as a result of the internet, believing that most of the radicalization that is occurring is a form of self radicalization, where many are being indoctrinated by what they find online; consequently, Wilson believes that “the recruiting is coming from YouTube”.¹⁰⁴ Wilson's beliefs are widespread amongst the security community with both scholars and security personnel sharing the belief that online recruitment is currently the most significant threat pertaining to jihadist recruitment.

The ability to log on to the internet and be able to see anything in the world, at any moment, could pose a serious threat. In the specific case of Somali people living in the diaspora, the ongoing conflict and images from the Somali battlefield have been used in propaganda videos in the hopes of stirring up nationalist feelings within the Somali community. Many Somalis see the American stance on the conflict as one that does not serve the interest of their homeland consequently promoting strong nationalist feelings and anti-American rhetoric in the community.¹⁰⁵

By using images of American involvement in the conflict in Somalia (American Air Force, and troops are on the ground in Somalia), many Somali people are “feeling betrayed” by American foreign policy as well as American domestic policy against their people. Somalis feel that, “the country I am living in is doing something wrong to my country”.¹⁰⁶ As a result of the American intervention in the conflicts, both in Somalia as well as the battle against the Islamic State, there is a growing rejection of American culture within the Somali community.¹⁰⁷

By placing Americans such as Abu-Mansoor al-Amriki (Omar Hammimi) in their propaganda videos, groups like al-Shabaab are better equipped to target more Americans due to the fact that these figures are able to relate to their audience in many

¹⁰³ *Somalia: Somali Americans Linked to ISIS Shock Minnesota Immigrant Community*, (Asia News Monitor, September 5, 2014).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ AlJazeeraEnglish, *The Rageh Omaar Report*.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Shwartz, Sharona, *'The Real Disneyland'*.

ways. Having somebody who grew up in the United States, speaks fluent English and knows American culture is advantageous when targeting native born Americans. Troy Kastigar, an al-Shabaab recruit was part of several al-Shabaab propaganda video's saying "this is best [place] to be, honestly if you guys only knew how much fun we have over here- this is the real Disneyland".¹⁰⁸ By referencing Disneyland, Kastigar makes it seem like being part of al-Shabaab in Somalia is like being in "the happiest place on earth" (Disneyland's tagline).¹⁰⁹

The recruitment videos available on various social networking sites and streaming sites, are also targeted to people that have identity issues in the United States. Al-Shabaab seems to offer an "out" by becoming part of the organization. Abu-Muslim (another American recruit) said in a 2009 video that, "we came from the US with a good life, and a good education, but we came to fight alongside our brothers of al-Shabaab...to be killed for the sake of God".¹¹⁰ For those struggling with identity issues, where they struggle with life in the United States, this message resonates with them, and

¹⁰⁸ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

¹⁰⁹ Foisy, Alexandra, *10 Reasons Why Disneyland Is The Happiest Place On Earth*, (Odyssey, December 07, 2015).

¹¹⁰ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

Case Studies

The following case studies outline different. Respectively, each individual presents a different background, and different factors that led to their radicalization, eventually leading to them joining either Daesh or al-Shabaab as foreign fighters. By examining different case studies, we can better understand the factors that lead people to decide to become jihadist fighters and how we can better prevent this phenomenon from occurring in the future.

Case Study: Abdirahamaan Muhumed

Abdirahamaan Muhumed, also known by the aliases Abdifatah Ahmed¹¹¹ and Abdifatah Afweyne, was a Somali immigrant living in the Twin Cities¹¹². He was a father of nine children and worked sporadically at the Minneapolis airport as a plane re-fueler for Delta Airlines between November 2001 to May 2011¹¹³.

Friends often said that Muhumed would talk at length about the violence in Gaza and Libya and that he had “dreamed” of joining the Ogaden National Liberation Front, an organization that wanted to carve out an independent state in Ethiopia for ethnic Somali nationals.¹¹⁴ He apparently had always aspired to be a “freedom fighter” for the sake of Allah.¹¹⁵

On July 8th 2013 Muhumed sent a text message to a friend of his, Mr. Hussein, claiming that, “god gave us jihad”¹¹⁶ and his involvement with the Islamic State was later confirmed over an exchange between Muhumed and a local Minnesota radio station over Facebook messages in which he confessed to joining the organization.¹¹⁷

It is believed that Muhumed died in battle in September 2014 along with another American, Douglas Arthur McCain, who was also from the Twin Cities¹¹⁸. His death was later confirmed when his family received a photograph of his body¹¹⁹. The deaths of McCain and Muhumed are the first two documented deaths of Americans fighting alongside the extremist group, ISIS¹²⁰.

¹¹¹ Healy, Jack, *For Jihad Recruits*.

¹¹² Counter Extremism Project, *Abdirahmaan Muhumed*, (Counter Extremism Project, nd).

¹¹³ Zennie, Michael, *Somali-American Who Died Fighting for ISIS Cleaned Planes for Delta Airlines at Minneapolis Airport Before He Joined Terrorist Group*, (Mail Online. September 03, 2014).

¹¹⁴ Healy, Jack, *For Jihad Recruits*.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ *Somalia: Somali Americans Linked to ISIS Shock Minnesota Immigrant Community*, (Asia News Monitor, September 5, 2014).

¹¹⁸ Zennie, Michael, *Somali-American Who Died Fighting for ISIS Cleaned Planes for Delta Airlines at Minneapolis Airport Before He Joined Terrorist Group*.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Muhumed's case is different from the typical foreign fighter as he is fighting jihad in a country which is not his own country of origin. Being that he is from Somalia, one would assume that he would rather join al-Shabaab than Daesh. However, at the time of his radicalization and travel, Dae'sh was more attractive as an organization than al-Shabaab most likely due to its significance in the region, which is the likely explanation behind Muhumed's decision to join Dae'sh over al-Shabaab. Muhumed's case is one example of a Somali who decided to join Dae'sh most likely due to the fact that he felt he could have more of an impact with Dae'sh than al-Shabaab.

Case Study: Omar Hammami

Omar Hammami, later known by the name Abu Mansoor al-Amriki, was the face of al-Shabaab’s foreign recruitment videos until his death on September 12, 2013. Although he is not from Minnesota he played a significant role in recruiting the roughly 40 Minnesotans who later followed him on his path to *Shahada* with al-Shabaab in Somalia.¹²¹

Omar grew up in Daphne, Alabama, a predominantly Christian town. Omar had a Christian mother and a Muslim Father. It was not until he traveled with his father to Syria, while he was in the 11th grade, that he decided to start practicing Islam.¹²² Upon his return, peers and teachers at his school described him as somebody who would always speak passionately about the Muslim faith and would always represent Arab states in the school’s Model United Nations debates, where he would defend the actions of said countries and their leaders including Usama Bin Laden. His words turned into violence when a student in a debate said that “Islam is stupid”.¹²³

After converting one of his closest friends to Islam and being kicked out of his mother’s home, he and his friend, Bernie Culveyhouse moved to Toronto in the hopes of joining a community that shared the same Islamic beliefs that they did. After settling in a Somali concentrated area of the city, Hammami and Culveyhouse wanted to pass on their beliefs to the younger, more influential Muslim community of Toronto and began preaching an anti-American rhetoric, claiming the “evil American foreign policy targeting Muslims”.¹²⁴

Soon after settling in Toronto, Hammami and Culveyhouse decided that they wanted to move once again, this time to a heavily Muslim populated country, Egypt. Culveyhouse claimed that Hammami had an obsession with internet café’s and

¹²¹ Elliott, Andrea, *The Jihadist Next Door*, (The New York Times, January 30, 2010).

¹²² Rogio, Bill, *Omar Hamimi Releases Part 1 of Autobiography*, (FDD’s Long War Journal, May 18, 2012).

¹²³ Anzalone, Christopher, *The Evolution of an American Jihadi: The Case of Omar Hamimi*, (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, June 21, 2012).

¹²⁴ Putzel Christof, *American Jihadi*, (Vanguard, July, 2010).

blogging which eventually led him to write posts declaring, “now is the time for action”.¹²⁵

After claiming to his wife that he was moving to Dubai in an attempt to look for work, it was later revealed that Hammami travelled to Somalia and joined the extremist group al-Shabaab. He quickly ascended the ranks of the organization and due to his level of English, became the face of their propaganda videos, which has been al-Shabaab’s primary recruitment tool. He is referred to as the first American to join al-Shabaab as well as the man responsible for recruiting the 30 or so Minnesotans who travelled to Somalia between 2009-2011.¹²⁶ His ability to connect with Americans on such a personal level was unlike any other recruitment tactic; consequently, it is most likely a contributing factor as to why he was so successful at recruiting American youth. Hammami played a role in recruiting Shirwa Ahmed (next case study) from Minnesota, and later, was the mastermind behind the attack in which Ahmed was a suicide bomber. In 2010, American intelligence claimed that Hammami was the “highest ranking American in al-Shabaab”.¹²⁷

In his video’s, he would glorify the actions of suicide bombers making statements like, “We need more like him, so if you can encourage more of your children and more of your neighbors and anyone around you to send people like him to this jihad, it would be a great asset for us”.¹²⁸ During his time with al-Shabaab, al-Amriki maintained an active twitter feed where he would regularly interact with American youth.

After challenging the group’s leadership, and their intentions as an Islamic fundamentalist organization in 2013, he left al-Shabaab and was then killed by the organization in September of 2013. Although he has been dead for the past three years, it is clear that Hammami played a quintessential role in al-Shabaab’s recruitment of Minnesotan youth throughout the years.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Elliott, Andrea, *The Jihadist Next Door*.

¹²⁶ Putzel Christof, *American Jihadi*.

¹²⁷ Elliott, Andrea, *The Jihadist Next Door*.

¹²⁸ Putzel Christof, *American Jihadi*.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Case Study: Shirwa Ahmed

In 1996, native Somali, Shirwa Ahmed left a Kenyan refugee camp for the United States.¹³⁰ Upon arrival in the United States he and his family settled in Portland however, they eventually moved to Minneapolis, most likely due to the size of the Somali population of the Twin Cities¹³¹.

While in high school, he was like any other student and reflected what American teenagers were like. He was described by his peers and teachers as a quiet yet pleasant student. Although it seemed as if he was integrating successfully into American society, in reality he still was more aligned with his Somali roots and the Somali community, which regularly clashed with the African American community in the city¹³².

Upon graduating from high school, he started college and worked at the Minneapolis airport where he pushed wheelchairs in order to make money. Like most of the Somali community in the diaspora, Ahmed would send half of his salary back to Somalia as remittance, consequently placing financial strain on him as well as his family¹³³.

In the years that he attended college, Ahmed distanced himself from his friends and became more in touch with his religion. He prayed five times a day, observed Muslim customs and practices and preached to other Somali youth to come to the mosque to pray¹³⁴.

Court documents that were made available indicate that Ahmed was reached out to by jihadist recruiters. Furthermore, a cooperating witness in an investigation claimed that Ahmed regularly participated in jihadist meetings in private residences,

¹³⁰ Elliott, Andrea, *A Call to Jihad, Answered in America*.

¹³¹ Mulligan, Scott, *Radicalization Within the Somali-American Diaspora*.

¹³² Meryhew, Richard & Shah, Allie *Minneapolis Somali Man Killed in Homeland*, (Star Tribune, July 11, 2009).

¹³³ Elliott, Andrea, *A Call to Jihad, Answered in America*.

¹³⁴ Elliott, Andrea, *A Call to Jihad, Answered in America*.

as well as mosques. At these meetings, sympathizers would discuss the need for Somali Americans to take up arms and join the *Jihad* in Somalia¹³⁵.

On December 4, 2007, Ahmed put his words into action when he travelled to Somalia by way of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (in order to fulfil the duty of *Hajj*) and then through Yemen¹³⁶. Upon his arrival in Somalia he attended an al-Shabaab training camp along with other foreign travelers from Europe, United States as well as other African nations¹³⁷.

In late October 2008, Ahmed made a phone call back to the United States, telling his sister that he was in Yemen and that he would be making his way home soon. However, on October 29, 2008 Ahmed carried out a suicide attack in which he drove a Toyota Land Cruiser laced with explosives through the streets of Hargeysa, the capital of Somaliland. Upon approaching an intersection, Ahmed accelerated a detonated the explosives next to the Ethiopian Consulate. At the same time that Ahmed carried out his attack, three other terrorists carried out similar suicide bombings in the northern breakaway area of Somaliland. The final death toll of the attacks reached 28 as well as leaving 48 people wounded¹³⁸.

Shirwa Ahmed was identified as the perpetrator of the attack after the Federal Bureau of Investigation recovered his fingerprint from a severed finger recovered at the scene of the explosion¹³⁹.

As previously discussed in the case study of Omar Hammami, Ahmed was recruited by Hammami, and is an example of how online recruitment plays such a large role in the radicalization process.

¹³⁵ United States Department of Justice, *Four More Men Sentenced for Providing Material Support to Terrorist*, (May 14, 2013).

¹³⁶ Mulligan, Scott, *Radicalization Within the Somali-American Diaspora*.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Elliott, Andrea, *A Call to Jihad, Answered in America*.

¹³⁹ United States Department of Justice, *Four More Men Sentenced for Providing Material Support to Terrorist*.

Countering Violent-Extremism in Minnesota

One of the more pressing questions about radicalization in Minnesota pertains to what is being done in order to counter violent extremism. The Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) program is a project of the Chief Federal Prosecutor for Minnesota, Andrew Luger¹⁴⁰. The program strives to generate educational and professional opportunities within the Somali Muslim community of Minnesota, with the program being led by 15 Somali Americans. The main goal of CVE is to prevent recruitment of youth to various terrorist organizations, which continues to be a struggle within the Somali-Minnesotan community.

Like everything, the program has been subject to criticism and has divided the Somali-American community. Many people within community, including Jaylani Hussein (Executive director of the council on American-Islamic relations), feel as if Somalis are a target simply based solely on their faith: “.....because now you’re saying that countering violent extremism is only from one community. The threat comes from one community, that community needs a program. The whole premise is wrong. This program no matter how good it is, is flawed from its principle.”¹⁴¹¹⁴²

However, other members of the Somali community have taken the initiative to be part of what they believe is the solution to the terrorist recruitment problem. Hibaaq Osman, a restaurant owner in the Karmel Mall (the oldest Somali mall in Minneapolis) has come out and said, “I feel like we as a community need to wake up”. He continued by saying “...you know what? Enough is enough. We are citizens, we are taxpayers, we own businesses, we need people to understand that we are also part of this country just the way anybody else is”¹⁴³.

¹⁴⁰Sperber, Amanda, *Somalis in Minnesota Question Counter-Extremism Program Targeted at Muslims*, (The Guardian, September 14, 2015).

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

In addition to government programs, there are citizens within the Minneapolis Muslim community that felt that they, personally, could be doing more to stop radicalization.

Mohamed Ahmed is a gas station manager in the Twin Cities who started a cartoon series aimed at countering radical propaganda. By consulting local Imams, he creates videos that prove Islamic State and al-Shabaab values are not those of true Islam and explains why they in fact reject Islam. Ahmed claims that “It’s the average people who must fight this war”. He then continued by saying, “It’s a game changer. As Muslims on the frontline of this issue – whether it’s fighting it physically or fighting in my ways with counter ideology – that is a way we are closer to victory”. Mohamed’s message has resonated with many in the Twin Cities, and he has begun to deliver his message directly to students in classroom as well as meeting with the US State Department and presenting at the Counter-Extremism Conference in London. Ahmed aims to reach the younger generation before they are targeted by extremist recruiters.

The US Department of Justice in 2015 pledged \$250,000 to combat terror recruitment within Somali youth in Minnesota. This money is intended to be used to implement guiding strategies set forth by the US Department of Justice which include:

- “Fostering a broad range of stakeholders who are poised for long-term, community investment.
- Support current initiatives that promote participation and engagement within the community.
- Train community members to identify youth who may be at risk for recruitment, such as those who feel disenfranchised. Support non-profit and community organizations that have the expertise to reengage these youths.
- Encourage messaging through social media and other platforms that negate potential recruitment propaganda.

- Prioritize economic and community development in target areas to promote engagement and investment in at-risk communities.
- Require transparency and accountability for all funds distributed for these purposes to build trust between governmental entities and the community.¹⁴⁴»

Employing these strategies, the Department of Justice believes that they will be successful in stopping the radicalization of youth in Minnesota. Abdi Warsame, a Minnesota City Council member (of Somali descent) claims that, “We [Somali’s] are the solution. It has to come from us,” he then continued by saying, “Yes, we’re working with the Department of Justice. It’s our friend.”¹⁴⁵»

However, while some feel optimistic about the program, many people within the Somali community have voiced concern. There is a strong level of distrust between government and the local Somali community. “The shadows of the U.S. Attorney’s Office are already covering these programs,” said Jaylani Hussein, Executive director of the Minnesota chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations. Hassan Jama, a Minnesotan Imam claimed that the new program is “...offensive to our community,” and “...singling us out”.¹⁴⁶

In order for these new programs to work, there must be full cooperation between the Somali-American community along with the government forces who are trying to stop radicalization within American society.

¹⁴⁴ Minnesota Department of Public Safety, *Terrorism Recruitment in Minnesota*, (2016).

¹⁴⁵ Capecchi, Christina, and Mitch Smith, *Minneapolis Fighting Terror Recruitment*, (The New York Times, September 09, 2015).

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Documented Cases

The chart that follows includes all documented cases of Minnesotans who travelled, or attempted to travel to join either al-Shabaab or Daesh. The chart includes information regarding each person's age, what they were convicted/responsible for and their level of education, including where they attended school. In cases where information was available, the accused prior criminal record will be discussed, and finally what their status is currently according to various news/government agencies. Like the case studies, compiling and examining this information could help in future efforts in stopping the radicalization process from occurring. By gaining a better understanding of the backgrounds of these individuals, a new model can be created in the hopes of stopping radicalization of youth in the future.

| Name | Age | Convicted for/ Responsible for | Education | Criminal Record | Status |
|---------------------------------|-----|---|--|--------------------|--|
| Abdikadir Ali Abdi | 19 | Charged with providing financial support and personnel to al-Shabaab. Also charged with conspiracy to kill abroad. ¹⁴⁷ | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Abdow Munye Abdow | 26 | Pleaded guilty in May 2010 to lying to federal agents during a terrorism investigation about being in a rental car with people who had later travelled to Somalia. | N/A | N/A | Served four months in jail starting July 2011 then four months of house arrest after his release. ¹⁴⁸ |
| Zacharia Yusuf Abdurahman | 19 | Was stopped trying to get on a flight from New York to get to Syria in 2014. Upon returning to Minnesota, he planned to leave for Syria but was caught by an FBI informant. Pleaded guilty in September 2015 for conspiracy to provide material support to a foreign terrorist group. | Graduated in 2013 from Heritage Academy of Science and Technology and was studying information technology at Minneapolis Community and Technical College | N/A | In custody and cooperating with the government. Currently awaiting his sentence on terror conspiracy charges. ¹⁴⁹ |

¹⁴⁷ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*, (Anti-Defamation League, February 2015).

¹⁴⁸ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

¹⁴⁹ Yuen, Laura, Mukhtar Ibrahim, and Sasha Aslanian, *Called to Fight: Minnesota's ISIS Recruits*, (Minnesota Public Radio News, March 25, 2015).

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|----|---|--|---|--|
| Khalid Mahamud Abshir | 26 | Charged for providing material support to terrorists | N/A | N/A | Still at large believed to have travelled to Somalia. ¹⁵⁰ |
| Hamza Naj Ahmed | 19 | Was stopped while attempting to get on plane in New York to travel to Syria. Federal prosecutors claim that his twitter feed suggested that he was willing to become a martyr. Judge ordered him to remain behind bars until his trial. | Did not graduate from High School (Burnsville High School) | When he was 18 he was suspended from his school and charged with disorderly conduct after fighting another student. The fight was witnessed by over 500 students. | In custody; charged with conspiracy to provide material support to a foreign terrorist group. ¹⁵¹ |
| Salah Osman Ahmed | 26 | Traveled to Somalia in 2007. Pleaded guilty for providing material support to terrorists in July 2009. | Former student at the North Hennepin Community College | N/A | Started serving 3 year sentence on May 14 th 2013. ¹⁵² |
| Shirwa Ahmed | 27 | Carried out suicide attack in October 2008 on the United Nations compound and the presidential palace in Hargeisa, killing 24 people. | Roosevelt High School Graduate in 2000. | N/A | Confirmed deceased. ¹⁵³ |
| Abdisalan Hussein Ali | 21 | Charged with providing financial | N/a | N/a | Killed after carrying out a |

¹⁵⁰ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

¹⁵¹ Yuen, Mukhtar, and Aslanian, *Called to Fight*.

¹⁵² ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|----|--|-----|-----|---|
| | | support and personnel to al-Shabaab and to a conspiracy to kill abroad. | | | suicide bombing attack in October 2011. ^{154 155} |
| Adarus Abdulle Ali | 25 | Charged with perjury for making false statements to a federal grand jury. In 2008 claimed that he didn't know anyone who travelled to Somalia. It was later discovered that he attended a meeting where people discussed travelling to Somalia to fight. In addition, he drove someone to the airport who later traveled to Somalia. | N/A | N/A | Served 24 months in federal prison, followed by 36 months of supervised release. ¹⁵⁶ |
| Amina Farah Ali | 33 | Arrested in August 2010 for raising funds for al-Shabaab. Went door-to-door in various Somali communities in Minnesota. Allegedly raised funds for al-Shabaab "under the false pretense that the funds were | N/A | N/A | Sentenced to 20 years in prison. ¹⁵⁷ |

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|----|---|--|-----|--|
| | | for the poor and needy”. Pleaded not guilty, but was convicted on charges of providing material support to al-Shabaab in October 2011. | | | |
| Jamal Bana | 19 | Left for Somalia to join al-Shabaab in November 2008. | At the time of his departure, he was studying engineering at Minneapolis Community and Technical College and Normandale College. | N/A | Reports indicate that he was killed while fighting with al-Shabaab in Mogadishu (July, 2009). ¹⁵⁸ |
| Farah Mohamad Beledi | 27 | Indicted in July 2010 for providing material support to terrorists. Killed two African Union peacekeepers and a Somali soldier during a suicide attack on a military base in Mogadishu on May 30, 2011. | N/A | N/A | Died as a suicide bomber in Mogadishu (May, 2011). ¹⁵⁹ |
| Abdirahman Yasin Daud | 21 | Planned over the course of 10 months to travel to Syria in order to join the Islamic State. Was arrested in California while attempting to purchase fake | N/A | N/A | Facing a possible life sentence in prison. ¹⁶⁰ |

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Yuen, Laura, Mukhtar Ibrahim, and Sasha Aslanian, *Called to Fight*.

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------|----|--|---|-----|---|
| | | passports from an undercover FBI agent. June 2016, Daud was found guilty of conspiring to provide material support to a terrorist organization as well as conspiring to commit murder overseas. | | | |
| Cabdulaahi Ahmed Faarax | 32 | Fought with al Shabaab in 2007 returned to Minnesota to recruit others | N/A | N/A | Still at large, last seen at the U.S.- Mexico Border Crossing in 2009. ¹⁶¹ |
| Adnan Abdihamid Farah | 19 | Planned to leave the United States to join the Islamic State. He had posted photos on his personal Facebook of Anwar al-Awlaki (American-born terrorist leader). Prosecutors claimed that his mother hid his passport. | Graduated from South High School (Minneapolis), in 2014. | N/A | Currently in custody; charged with conspiring to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization. ¹⁶² |
| Mohamed Abdihamid Farah | 21 | Left Minneapolis for San Diego in 2014 in the hopes of obtaining a fake passport. However, the connection for the passport was in fact an FBI | Graduated in 2012 from Heritage Academy of Science and Technology and attended St. Paul | N/A | In custody; charged with conspiracy and attempt to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization. ¹⁶⁴ |

¹⁶¹ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

¹⁶² Yuen, Laura, Mukhtar Ibrahim, and Sasha Aslanian, *Called to Fight*.

¹⁶⁴ Counter Extremism Project, *Mohamed Abdihamid Farah*, (Counter Extremism Project. January 12, 2017).

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| | | informant. He was apparently planning on crossing the Mexican border in order to fly to the Middle East before he was arrested. In November 2014, he took a bus to New York from Minneapolis hoping to get on a flight to Syria but was arrested before boarding the plane. ¹⁶³ | College. | | |
| Omar Ali Farah | 21 | Left the United States to join al-Shabaab in July 2012. ¹⁶⁵ | N/A | N/A | Status Unknown. ¹⁶⁶ |
| Dahir Gure | N/A | Believed to have travelled to Somalia to join al-Shabaab | N/A | N/A | Left for Somalia on October 30, 2007 and is believed to be dead. ¹⁶⁷ |
| Burhan Hassan | 17 | Traveled to Somalia in November 2008 to join al-Shabaab. | Left during his senior year at Roosevelt High School (Minneapolis). | N/A | Media reports claim that he was killed in battle in Mogadishu (June 2009). ¹⁶⁸ |
| Hawo Mohamed Hassan | 63 | Arrested in August 2010 for raising funds for al-Shabaab. Went door-to-door in | N/A | N/A | Sentenced to 10 years in prison. ¹⁶⁹ |

¹⁶⁶ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Yuen, Laura, Mukhtar Ibrahim, and Sasha Aslanian, *Called to Fight*.

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| | | <p>various Somali communities in Minnesota. Allegedly raised funds for al-Shabaab “under the false pretense that the funds were for the poor and needy”. Pleaded not guilty but was convicted on charges of providing material support to al-Shabaab and lying to the FBI in October 2011.</p> | | | |
| Kamal Said Hassan | 24 | <p>Pleaded guilty in February 2009 for providing material support and conspiring to kill, kidnap, maim and injure people outside of the United States. Also was charged with making a false statement to the FBI regarding his involvement with the organization Travelled to Somalia in July 2009</p> | <p>Attended Minneapolis Community and Technical College in 2006.</p> | N/A | <p>Sentenced to 18 years in federal prison followed by 20 years of supervised release.¹⁷⁰</p> |
| Mohamed Abdullahi Hassan | 18 | <p>Travelled to Somalia in August 2008. Charged in 2009 for providing material support and conspiring to</p> | <p>Left for Somalia a year before graduating from Roosevelt</p> | N/A | <p>Still at large, believed to still be in Somalia. Still maintains active social media accounts</p> |

¹⁷⁰ ADL, Al-Shabaab's American Recruits.

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| | | kill, kidnap, maim and injure people outside of the United States. | High School | | encouraging others to join terrorist groups. Believed to have been in touch with Douglas McAuthor McCain (Died fighting with ISIS in August 2014). ¹⁷¹ |
| Mohamoud Hassan | 23 | Traveled to Somalia in November 2008 to join al-Shabaab. | Engineering student at the University of Minnesota. | N/A | Reportedly killed in Mogadishu in September 2009. ¹⁷² |
| Hawo Mohamed Hassan | 63 | Arrested in August 2010 for raising funds for al-Shabaab. Went door-to-door in various Somali communities in Minnesota. Allegedly raised funds for al-Shabaab “under the false pretense that the funds were for the poor and needy”. Pleaded not guilty but was convicted on charges of providing material support to al-Shabaab and lying to the FBI in October 2011. | N/A | N/A | Sentenced to 10 years in prison. ¹⁷³ |
| Yusra Ismail | 20 | Left the Twin Cities on August | Graduated from | N/A | Still at large, charged with |

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

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| | | 21, 2014. Told her family she was going to a friend's bridal shower; however, she boarded a plane to Norway using a passport stolen from a Minneapolis woman. Ismail called her family to inform them that she was in Syria. | Lighthouse Academy of Nations (High School) in 2013 | | stealing and misusing a passport. ¹⁷⁴ |
| Abdiweli Yassin Isse | 25 | Charged in 2009 for providing material support and conspiring to kill, kidnap, maim and injure people outside of the United States. Raised money for himself and others to travel to Somalia. | N/A | N/A | Still at large, last seen in October 2009 at the U.S.-Mexico border crossing. ¹⁷⁵ |
| Yusuf Jama | 21 | Unsuccessfully tried to leave the United States to join the Islamic State in May 2014 along with two others, before a family member confronted them. However, Jama flew from New York to Turkey on | Graduated from Minneapolis Public School in August 2012. | N/A | Presumed deceased. ¹⁷⁶ |

¹⁷⁴ Yuen, Laura, Mukhtar Ibrahim, and Sasha Aslanian, *Called to Fight*.

¹⁷⁵ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

¹⁷⁶ Yuen, Laura, Mukhtar Ibrahim, and Sasha Aslanian, *Called to Fight*.

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| | | June 9, 2014. First known traveler who travelled by bus to NYC from the Twin Cities in order to join the Islamic State. | | | |
| Troy Kastigar | 28 | Left for Somalia in November 2008 to join al-Shabaab. Was the face of al-Shabaab's propaganda videos. | N/A | N/A | Family received information in September 2009 that he had been killed in battle. ¹⁷⁷ |
| Zakaria Maruf | 30 | Travelled to Somalia in December 2007. Charged in 2009 for providing material support and conspiring to kill, kidnap, maim and injure people outside of the United States. | N/A | Had violent gang history but information about criminal record is not available. | Maruf's family claims that he was killed in battle in Somalia (July 2009). ¹⁷⁸ |
| Douglas McAuthor McCain | 33 | Converted to Islam and was close friends with Troy Kastigar (al-Shabaab). McCain was the first American to die while fighting for the Islamic State in August 2014. | Robbinsdale Cooper High School Graduate (New Hope, Minnesota). | N/A | Deceased. ¹⁷⁹ |
| Hanad Abdullahi Mohallim | 18 | Federal agents believe that Mohallim flew to Turkey and then made his way to | Attended Burnsville High School, but did not graduate | N/A | Presumed dead. ¹⁸⁰ |

¹⁷⁷ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Yuen, Laura, Mukhtar Ibrahim, and Sasha Aslanian, *Called to Fight*.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

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| | | Syria. He allegedly told his family on phone conversations that he was serving as a border guard in Syria. | (Burnsville, Minnesota). | | |
| Omer Abdi Mohamed | 26 | Pleaded guilty on July 18, 2011 for providing material support and conspiring to kill, kidnap, maim and injure people outside of the United States. Responsible for the recruitment of six men to fight in Somalia. | Attended Roosevelt High School prior to his arrest (Minneapolis). | N/A | Sentenced to 12 years in prison on May 14 th , 2013 for his role in recruiting on behalf of al-Shabaab. ¹⁸¹ |
| Abdirahmaan Muhumed | 29 | Was a Somali nationalist. Wanted to join a rebel group fighting for the autonomy of Ethiopia's ethnic Somali region. In an interview with MPR news in June 2014, he said that he had joined the Islamic State to save the global Muslim community. | N/A | N/A | In August 2014, his family received a photo showing a dead body, presumed to be Muhumed's. ¹⁸² |
| Hanad Mustafe Musse | 19 | Took a bus from Minneapolis to New York in order to get on a plane at | Student at Minneapolis Community and Technical | N/A | Is currently in custody and is awaiting sentencing on a |

¹⁸¹ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

¹⁸² Ibid.

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| | | JFK; however, federal agents stopped him. After, he allegedly made other attempts to leave the country until his father confronted him. In September 2015, Musse pleaded guilty to conspiring to support the Islamic State. | College | | terror conspiracy charge. ¹⁸³ |
| Abdi Nur | 20 | Leading up to his travel, Nur became more religious and began discussing jihad. Family members told the FBI that the changes occurred around the same time Nur began attending the al-Farooq Youth and Family Center (large mosque in Bloomington, Minnesota). Left the twin cities on May 29 th , 2014 for Syria. | Graduated from Southwest High School and attended Normandale Community College (Bloomington, Minnesota). | N/A | Still at large; charged with conspiracy to provide material support to a foreign terrorist group. ¹⁸⁴ |
| Abdirashid Ali Omar | N/A | Allegedly traveled to Somalia in 2008 to join al-Shabaab. | N/A | N/A | Believed to have died fighting with al-Shabaab in battle against African Union peacekeepers in |

¹⁸³ Yuen, Laura, Mukhtar Ibrahim, and Sasha Aslanian, *Called to Fight*.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

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| | | | | | September 2010. ¹⁸⁵ |
| Ahmed Ali Omar | 24 | Travelled to Somalia in December 2007. Charged in 2009 for providing material support and conspiring to kill, kidnap, maim and injure people outside of the United States. | Graduated from Edison High School in 2004 | N/A | Believed to still be at large in Somalia. |
| Guled Ali Omar | 20 | Initially attempted to travel to Syria in May 2014 and had used his financial aid from college in order to pay for his travels. In November 2014, he attempted to board a plane from Minneapolis to San Diego, but was not allowed on board and then he was taken into custody. | High School Graduate and worked as a security guard in order to fund his education at a local community college. | N/A | In custody; charged with conspiracy and attempting to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization. ¹⁸⁶ |
| Mahamud Said Omar | 43 | Arrested in the Netherlands in 2009, then transferred to a U.S. District Court for providing material support to terrorists outside of the U.S. FBI claims that he provided young Somali-American | N/A | N/A | Sentenced to 20 years in prison for his role in recruiting for al-Shabaab on May 13, 2013 ¹⁸⁷ |

¹⁸⁵ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

¹⁸⁶ Yuen, Laura, Mukhtar Ibrahim, and Sasha Aslanian, *Called to Fight*.

¹⁸⁷ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

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| | | men with funds to travel to Somalia. Also visited an al-Shabaab safe house and donated money for the purchase of AK-47 rifles. | | | |
| Mohamed Osman | 19 | Left the United States to join al-Shabaab in July 2012. ¹⁸⁸ | N/A | N/A | Status Unknown. ¹⁸⁹ |
| Mustafa Ali Salat | 18 | Travelled to Somalia in August 2008. Charged in August 2009 for providing material support and conspiring to kill, kidnap, maim and injure people outside of the United States. | Left a year before graduating from Harding High School in St. Paul. | N/A | Still at large outside of the United States, presumably Somalia. ¹⁹⁰ |
| Abdirizak Warsame | 20 | Encouraged and planned the departure of several friends (some of which have pleaded guilty and others who are awaiting trial). Not clear if he made an actual attempt to join the Islamic State; however, he pleaded guilty in plotting to join ISIS. | Graduated in 2013 from Heritage Academy of Science and Technology in Minneapolis. Was also a student at Normandale Community College. | N/A | In custody; cooperating with the government and awaiting sentencing on terror conspiracy charge. ¹⁹¹ |

¹⁸⁸ Yuen, Laura, Mukhtar Ibrahim, and Sasha Aslanian, *Called to Fight*.

¹⁸⁹ ADL, *Al-Shabaab's American Recruits*.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Yuen, Laura, Mukhtar Ibrahim, and Sasha Aslanian, *Called to Fight*.

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| Abdullahi Yusuf | 18 | Just after turning 18, Yusuf tried to board a plane from Minneapolis to Istanbul but the FBI was waiting for him at the airport after being alerted by a passport officials suspicion. Pleaded guilty to conspiring to provide material support to a foreign terror group. | Graduated from Heritage Academy of Science and Technology in Minneapolis and had enrolled in Inver Hills Community College | N/A | In custody; awaiting sentencing on terror-conspiracy charges. ¹⁹² |
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¹⁹² Ibid.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a better understanding of the Somali community and their culture could greatly benefit the United States and the state of Minnesota in their attempt at stopping the radicalization of Somali migrants. By working with leaders in the Somali community, the government could re-build the trust that they fragmented in previous attempts to stopping radicalization. Additionally, the economic situation that most new Somali residents in Minnesota face has proven to be a contributing factor to the radicalization process; consequently, working with the community to fight poverty could have a significant impact on the number of people being radicalized.

While the American government has successfully stopped many Americans from reaching their goal of joining the Islamic State or other terrorist organizations, some have still achieved this feat and thus this issue remains one of the most pressing facing the United States today. Now more than ever, it seems as if integration of foreigners into American society is not only more challenging, but significantly more important with the idea of more refugees arriving in the United States within the coming years.

With an influx of foreigners arriving in the United States over the past few years, and with those numbers expected to continue to rise, both federal and state governments need to ensure that they work with newcomers to make their transition into American society easier.

By easing the transition and working alongside the existing Somali population in the United States through the Counter Violent Extremism program, the government could see a dramatic change in the number of youth being radicalized by organizations like al-Shabaab and the Islamic State.

With Minnesota recently being a victim of a domestic terror attack carried out for the first time by a Somali who was inspired by Daesh, it is evident that changes must be made. The government as well as its intelligence agencies, must work

alongside the Somali community in order to find a better way at combating radicalization.

The distrust between the government and the local Somali community only seemed to spark more radicalization, where many youths feel that the United States is “betraying their homeland”. While there is no way of stopping online radicalization completely, various steps can be taken in order to more effectively monitor material that is easily available online.

By employing resources like the Counter Violent Extremism program; which are readily available to them within the existing Somali community in Minnesota, the government could better understand what propaganda is attracting the young population most. Therefore, this would allow the government to be more effective in reaching the target audience before organizations like Daesh and al-Shabaab.

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