# American Self-Radicalizing Terrorists and the Allure of "Jihadi Cool/Chic"

# American Self-Radicalizing Terrorists and the Allure of "Jihadi Cool/Chic"

By

Caroline Joan "Kay" S. Picart

American Self-Radicalizing Terrorists and the Allure
of "Jihadi Cool/Chic"

By Caroline Joan "Kay" S. Picart

This book first published 2017

For my husband, Jerry Rivera, whose love and loyalty are powerfully enduring, and the Picart, Terrell, and Rivera families, whose devotion and support help ease many of life's storms and contingencies

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CHAPTER ONE

THE RISE OF AMERICAN SELF-
ACTIVATING/RADICALIZING TERRORISTS

## Introduction: A Genealogy of American Self-Activating Terrorists

With the success of the crackdown on traditional terrorist cells, terrorism has evolved to generate "self-activating" or "self-radicalizing" terrorists. As noted in Europol's Report: "As a consequence of sustained military pressure, al-Qaeda core have publicly discouraged sympathizers from travelling to conflict zones in order to join them. Al-Qaeda has instead promoted the idea of individually planned and executed larger attacks in Western countries without the active assistance of any larger organization."[1] For example, in June 2011, Adam Gadahn, an American-born spokesperson for As-Sahab, al-Qaeda's media wing, was featured in an English-language video message, titled: "Do Not Rely on Others, Take the Task Upon Yourself." Here, Gadahn clearly advocates self-radicalized terrorist operations and suggests some ways to carry this out, exploiting possible openings in legal regulations regarding the ownership of firearms. "Let's take America as an example. America is absolutely awash with easily obtainable firearms. You can go down to a gun show at the local convention center and come away with a fully automatic assault rifle, without a background check, and most likely without having to show an identification card. So what are you waiting for?"[2] Additionally, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), an al-Qaeda affiliate, using its online English-language magazine *Inspire*, has actively advocated "open source jihad," which is aimed at providing information to aid aspiring self-radicalized jihadists in planning and executing their attacks, without having to travel to traditional jihadist training camps or to operate in cells. Thus, the Fall 2010 edition urged self-radicalizing terrorism, under the guise of editorializing: "Spontaneous operations performed by individuals and cells here and there over the whole world, without connections between them, have put the local and international intelligence apparatus

in a state of confusion, as arresting the members of the aborted cells does not influence the operational activities of others who are not connected with them."[3] In an eerie foreshadowing of the Boston Marathon Bombings, the summer 2010 issue gave advice on how to make a pipe bomb using ordinary, easily obtainable materials.

That shift from organized terrorist network to self-activating or self-radicalizing terrorists (of which lone wolf terrorists can be viewed as a subset, though definitional issues are thorny, as a later section in this chapter points out) has been openly acknowledged by, for example, the Obama administration. On August 15, 2011—a little less than a month after 32-year-old Anders Breivik was charged with killing 77 people in back-to-back terrorist attacks in Norway—then-President Barack Obama opined that a "lone wolf" terrorist strike in the United States is more likely than a major coordinated effort like the 9/11 attacks by traditional terrorist cells. In an interview with CNN, the incumbent president declared: "The risk that we're especially concerned over right now is the lone wolf terrorist, somebody with a single weapon being able to carry out wide-scale massacres of the sort that we saw in Norway recently."[4]

Approximately six months later, then-U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano acknowledged the emerging security threat at a meeting of European security officials in Paris. "There's been a lot of evolution over the past three years," she stated. "The thing that's most noticeable to me is the growth of the lone wolf, the single attacker in the United States or elsewhere who is not part of a larger global conspiracy or network."[5] Finally, only days before the one-year anniversary of Osama bin Laden's death during the May 1, 2011 raid on his hideout in Pakistan, a joint intelligence bulletin issued by the Department of Homeland Security, the F.B.I. and the U.S. Northern Command warned that lone wolf terrorists could use the date to avenge the killing of the former al-Qaeda leader because there was intelligence that indicated that terrorist groups such as al Shabaab in Somalia, northern Africa's al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the Pakistani Taliban, had rallied for such action.[6] More recently, in November 2013, then-Attorney General Eric Holder said that his greatest fear was that of a lone wolf attacker acting on U.S. soil, such as the attackers involved in the Washington Navy Yard and Los Angeles International Airport shootings.[7]

Thus, the value of analyzing the more recent evolutions of forms of terrorism, especially self-activating or self-radicalizing terrorists, of which "lone wolves" appear to be the most monstrously depicted in the American media, is of paramount importance. In popular parlance and even in policy-oriented media discourse, as illustrated above, there appears

to be an essential conflation of "self-radicalizing"/"self-activating" terrorism with "lone wolf" terrorism. Nevertheless, to analyze how lone wolf terrorists become what they are, one must first return to the task of attempting to characterize what lone wolf terrorists are, for the functional purposes of this book. Beyond that provisional working description, this book moves into several detailed case studies of fairly recent infamous American self-radicalizing terrorists, ranging from Colleen LaRose ("Jihad Jane") to Tamerlan Tsarnaev and Jahar/Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (the "Boston Marathon bombers"), and finally closing with brief sketches of Omar Mateen (the "Orlando Nightclub shooter") and Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik (the "San Bernardino killers").

The urgency of exploring this topic was underlined by psychologist and longtime U.S. government consultant Marc Sageman; he stated: "After all this funding and this flurry of publications, with each new terrorist incident we realize that we are no closer to answering our original question about what leads people to turn to political violence. . ."[8] What catalyzed my decision to write this book are several factors: 1.) a growing interest in the emergence of American "self-activating" or "self-radicalizing" terrorists as linked to internet activity, as evidenced by more books, scholarly articles, and newspaper reports being published on these topics; and 2.) a lack of a sustained critical examination of, in particular, the culture of "jihadi cool" or "jihadi chic," and why it appears so successful in gaining new converts. Generally sketched, the theoretical framework of the book flows from the following premises. The internet provides the means through which a "self-activating" terrorist may first self-radicalize through some imaginary or sympathetic connection with an organized terrorist network. Additionally, the internet enables such a self-activating terrorist to move into the stage of radical violent action. The internet serves both functions by not only providing the lone wolf with not only a rhetorical medium for self-justification and communication through the use of "monster talk" and its converse, the rhetoric about the "good citizen," but also by serving as a source for relatively inexpensive and more unpredictable technologies of mass destruction.

Crucial to this analysis is the distinction between radicalization of thought and radicalization of action, as a theoretical rhetoric of radicalization does not automatically convert into a rhetoric of radical action unless there are catalysts at work. The internet, as well as imagined relations cemented by the rhetorics of "jihadi cool" or "jihadi chic," can function as these crucial catalysts, galvanizing monster talk into monstrous action. The book focuses specifically on three case studies of three well known American self-activating terrorists: Colleen LaRose;

Tamerlan Tsarnaev; and Jahar (Dzhokhar) Tsarnaev. (I choose the name "Jahar Tsarnaev," the name the Defense team chose to use during the 2015 trial, rather than "Dzhokhar Tsarnaev," the version that appears in most media coverage, because whereas the former name is linked with an attempt to humanize him by locating his development against the backdrop of his relationships with his family, and especially his older brother, Tamerlan, the latter has become synonymous with notoriety.) Each case study is mapped in a manner so as to describe key elements of each terrorist's childhood and early formative experiences, education, psychological factors, ideology, the turning point at which ideological commitment dictated that radical rhetoric be converted into radical action, and very briefly, the denouement thereafter.

The point of this book is less to make some kind of comprehensive profile, which can be reduced to a checklist, than to map the role the internet plays, in the "self-radicalization" of these recent American self-activating terrorists. In addition, this project aims to analyze how different factors—mental, psychological, social, and economic—interact with imaginative elements and contribute to the formation of these three particular self-activating terrorists, and ultimately galvanizes them to move from a rhetoric of radical talk to a rhetoric of radical action, using Silber and Bhatt's[9] model of radicalization as an initial heuristic. Silber and Bhatt's model has been problematized largely because it assumed both a linear and reductive progression through the four stages of radicalization, and engaged in a form of profiling based on religious affiliation[10] – which this book clearly and emphatically does not do. I reserve discussion of this four-stage model of radicalization, and how this book deploys it, simply as an initial framework for analysis, not as a deterministic tool for prediction, for later in this chapter.

## Surveying the Field through Different Lenses

Despite the plethora of books on terrorism, few critical manuscripts attempt to create a coherent but complex theoretical framework concerning how "self-radicalizing" terrorists become what they are, using detailed case studies. Indeed, the field of radicalization studies is characterized by a dynamic debate, with a profusion of various models: there are approximately sixteen known empirical and non-empirical models of how radicalization occurs;[11] at least five conceptual phased models were built from those prior mentioned models,[12] and at least twelve "pathways" or mechanisms of radicalization[13] have been identified, with the possibility that there are more to be discovered. What sets

*American Self-Radicalizing Terrorists and the Allure of Jihadi Cool/Chic* apart from other scholarly monographs about this topic is its critical examination of connections binding: (1.) internet activity on radical sites and the genesis of self-activating terrorists; (2.) the aesthetic and imagined or virtual community created by the culture of "jihadi cool" or "jihadi chic;" and (3.) a detailed mapping of various factors that influenced these individuals' movement from radical thought to radical action, inclusive of mental, psychological, social, and economic factors, as well as other demographic elements, such as gender, race or class.

In *Lone Wolf Terrorism: Understanding the Growing Threat*,[14] Jeffrey Simon sets forth a comprehensive treatment of lone wolf terrorists, delving into a variety of motivations and backgrounds, and also proposes a set of policies designed to prevent and respond to this type of terrorism. However, while Simon's focus is wide-ranging, moving across the examples of Anders Breivik in Norway to Nidal Malik Hasan in the U.S., this book specifically focuses, in detail, on three American case studies of self-activating terrorists of relatively more recent occurrence – those of Colleen LaRose; Tamerlan Tsarnaev; and Dzokhar (Jahar) Tsarnaev. Although Simon addresses, to some extent, the issue of gender in particular, in relation to the formation of lone wolf terrorists (and makes generalizations about why there seem to be so few female lone wolf terrorists, in which he conflates sex and gender), he does not address deeper structural issues, such as the issue that the very social construction of what is "attractive" or "romantic" about becoming a terrorist, to the predominant demographic it attracts, is tied up with being hypermasculine (for men).

However, as this book demonstrates, Colleen LaRose, in particular presents a complex case, as the roles she played, and her media depictions, allowed her to bend traditional gender roles. Thus, LaRose's example is particularly insightful because it allows one to analyze the factors that enabled her to bend gender, in ways that another blonde American woman who had also made the shift to radical action a little later than LaRose did, Jamie Paulin Ramirez, was constrained from doing. Finally, although this book does draw from Simon's insights, it contextualizes the emergence of these three self-radicalizing terrorists against the prevailing internet culture of "jihadi cool" or "jihadi chic" – which is not an integral part of Simon's book.

In a manner similar to Simon, Ramon Spaiij's *Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism*[15] also similarly focuses on a global approach to the study of lone wolf terrorism, and is much more heavily quantitative in its approach than Simon's. Drawing much of his data from the Global

Terrorism Database (hosted by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism) alongside the Terrorism Knowledge Base, Spaiij singles out 88 "solo-actor" terrorists, claiming 123 lives across 15 Western countries as the basis for many of the generalizations he makes. In contrast, this book essentially begins where some of Spaiij's observations end, such as the peculiarly American origins of "leaderless resistance" advocated in the 1980s by Louis Beam (of Aryan Nations infamy) and later advocated with renewed enthusiasm in the 2000s by propagandists such as Tom Metzger (perhaps the sole member of WAR, or White Aryan Resistance). In turn, this book focuses on the American origins of "jihadi cool" culture, beginning with Adam Yahiye Gadahn's initially clumsy propaganda attempts at replicating the visual aesthetic that led to the success of MTV videos.

As opposed to Spaiij's book, which takes a keenly quantitative approach, this book deliberately takes a qualitative approach (which in no way devalues Spaiij's approach), substituting detailed biographies and timelines of LaRose's and the Tsarnaev brothers' movements across the various phases of radicalization for pie charts and statistical tables. Furthermore, the book focuses, less on statistical figures and pie charts, than an examination of the visual and narrative aesthetic characteristic of the culture of "jihadi cool," which has, strangely, become a fashion statement as well as mechanism of self-created stardom through the posting of strategic selfies on social media. And while Spaiij's book ends with what seems like a comforting conclusion – that based on number-crunching incidents of lone wolf terrorism as opposed to organized terrorism, very few successful attacks have occurred, and that even fewer incidents have resulted in massive destruction and death, this book begins with confronting recent American policy, in the wake of the Anders Breivik's shooting spree, as advocating a heightened awareness of an increase in incidents of self-radicalizing terrorism, particularly with the success of ISIS' recruitment tactics. Even more recently, the book takes into account the devastation wrought by the San Bernardino killers, in 2015, and the Orlando Night Club shooter in 2016.

Susan Moeller, in *Packaging Terrorism: Co-opting the News for Politics and Profit*,[16] uses a scholarly lens to analyze the role the media plays in shaping the contemporary perception regarding international terrorism. Covering how western media have depicted international terrorism since September 11, 2001, she exposes the priorities and assumptions that underlie political debates and discussions regarding the coverage of such news events. Although this book intersects with Moeller's insights regarding the rhetoric of "evil" that became inaugurated

with then-President George W. Bush's fall 2006 speech in the wake of 9/11, this book goes far beyond that insight by arguing that that speech, which cast the world in dualistic terms - effectively dividing the world into good (the U.S. and allies of the U.S.) and evil (enemies of the U.S., broadly termed "terrorists"), left little room for anything save an all-out campaign for the total destruction of those designated "evil." This speech became the template for a thoroughgoing militant rhetoric that mimed the violent fundamentalism of Osama Bin Laden and functioned, in effect, as an example of "monster talk." "Monster talk," etymologically traced, is a form of public preachment[17] that warns against ("*monere*") or points to ("*monstrare*") that which stands beyond the gates of the city state, which the "Good Citizen," the monster's counterpart, guards. Thus, this book shows that the rhetoric of "jihadi cool" or "jihadi chic" is a reactive miming of that monstrous discourse; even more dangerously, the rhetoric of "jihadi cool/chic" is strategically targeted towards disenfranchised young men and women, who seek to create a name for themselves, and who are drawn to the romantic construction of the "badass" and of being countercultural.

McCauley and Moskalenko, psychologists who are acknowledged radicalization experts and consultants to the Department of Homeland Security, write mainly using a social psychology standpoint but borrowing sometimes from Social Movement Theory. McCauley and Moskalenko in *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us*,[18] sketch twelve diverse pathways to radicalization into terrorist activity, echoing contemporary academic findings that there is no single monolithic pathway towards radicalization. Of particular significance to this book are a number of pathways, which could lead to violent radical action, that could be characterized as "non-rational" because they are responses neither to ideology nor to political exigencies. Instead, these pathways are responses to combinations of sometimes subtle social factors such as group dynamics, boundary hardening, and even love.

McCauley and Moskalenko's analysis, hybridized with Silber and Bhatt's more linear four-stage model of radicalization, provides a crucial part of the theoretical framework of this book. In particular, McCauley and Moskalenko's descriptions of six individual level mechanisms of radicalization are instructive, and may be traced in the case histories upon which this book focuses. Briefly summarized, these are: 1.) personal grievance, in which one seeks revenge for harm done to the self, or to loved ones; 2.) group grievance, in which one seeks revenge for harm done to a group or cause about which the individual cares; 3.) slippery slope, in which an individual is radicalized through increasing political

involvement; 4.) love, in which one becomes radicalized through attraction to someone already radicalized; 5.) risk and status, which can move individuals (especially young men) toward violence regardless of ideology; and 6.) unfreezing, in which an individual becomes open to new ideas and identity after losing long-standing reference points.

As this book shows, although there is some cross-pollination or interaction across the different mechanisms, there appear to be principal mechanisms at work in the three different cases. For example, in the case of Colleen LaRose, it was probably mechanism four: love, or the search for it, and in a gender-bending way, mechanism five: risk and status, which were the crucial factors. Comparatively, in the case of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, it was probably mechanism one: personal grievance, conflated with mechanism two: group grievance, as well as mechanism five: risk and status, which were the prime moving elements. Similarly, in the case of Jahar Tsarnaev, it was probably mechanism five: risk and status, along with mechanism six: unfreezing, which were of crucial import. However, although this book does draw from McCauley and Moskalenko's insights, it strives to keep any academic phrasing, of the unfolding of the narratives of how Colleen LaRose and the Tsarnaev brothers move from radical thought, to radical action, to a minimum; nevertheless, it does not shy away from the use of complex terms, when necessary. As the book shows in vivid detail, each narrative is unique.

The book's conclusions are thus very much in line with current research regarding how individuals evolve into terrorists. Former CIA officer and psychologist, Marc Sageman, analyzed over five hundred cases, to arrive at the insight that although one could describe distinct stages of radicalization,[19] he cautioned against the illusion that "[o]ne can simply draw a line, put markers on it and gauge where people are along this path to see whether they are close to committing atrocities."[20] Similarly, the Rand Corporation, based on a fourteen year study of the process of radicalization, concluded that "no single pathway towards terrorism exists"[21] and that the attempt to predict who, among a group of similarly situated individuals, would likely adopt radical views, much less turn violent, is fraught with difficulty, as much seems to be due to "happenstance."[22] Finally, in a Department of Homeland Security-supported study, McCauley and Moskalenko concluded that although they had outlined twelve possible pathways to radicalization (while leaving room for the possible discovery of more), that "radicalization progression cannot be understood as an invariable set of steps or 'stages' from sympathy to radicalism."[23]

Finally, although Jessica Stern's *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*[24] is significantly older than the prior books mentioned, it is a landmark book and was a *New York Times* Notable Book. Written from the point of view of a journalist who spent four years interviewing extremist members of three global religions – Christians, Jews and Muslims – it is composed as an engaging and empathetic (rather than sympathetic) narrative, rather than an academic treatise. This is not to say Stern's book is devoid of scholarly analysis; in fact, Stern's book prefigures many of McCauley and Moskalenko's insights regarding how alienation and humiliation, for instance, can be part of how individuals embark on a process of radicalization. This book will attempt to return, to some extent, to Stern's more accessible style of writing, particularly in terms of recounting the timelines and events that mark Colleen LaRose's and the Tsarnaev brothers' movements towards radical action, without sacrificing the rigor of McCauley and Moskalensko's more overtly scholarly way of phrasing their arguments. Additionally, while Stern's book has only one chapter specifically devoted to lone wolf terrorists, with the majority of her book devoted more to organized global terrorist movements, in comparison, this book keeps its focus principally on sketching detailed portraits of three specific American self-activating terrorists, Colleen LaRose, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, and Jahar Tsarnaev, whose case studies form the main body of this book. To close, it is important to note the variety of sources upon which this book relies, ranging from academic books and articles, media accounts, court documents, government documents, think tank policy papers, blogs, among others. This approach is necessary, given the fast pace of the events, as well as the fact that the landscape in relation to American self-radicalizing terrorism, as connected to global events, is always evolving.

## "Lone Wolf Terrorism" and "Self-Radicalizing/ Self-Actualizing Terrorism": Contested Terms

The purpose of this section of the introductory chapter is not to formulate an absolute definition of "lone wolf terrorism," nor of "self-radicalizing terrorism," which is generally used interchangeably with the first term, and is also a term that seems to defy absolute parsing. There is no "iron-clad, dictionary-approved, universally agreed-upon definition for 'self-radicalization'. . . ."[25] Matthew Weybrecht offers the following as a general description for the highly contested term: "Self-radicalization refers to the phenomenon wherein individuals radicalize by consuming

extremist literature but have few, if any, formal ties to any terrorist organization."[26]

Avoiding an overly-academic emphasis on definitions as ends in themselves, it is important to note that in the American media, particularly, the term "lone wolf terrorism" is the most heinously described form of self-radicalizing/self-activating terrorism. Similarly, "lone wolf terrorism" is a contested term, and has affinities with two others: "leaderless resistance" and "solo terrorism."[27] As Petter Nesser notes: "There is no consensus regarding the definition of these concepts, something that constitutes an analytical obstacle."[28] Given these difficulties, the purpose of this section is more pragmatic than strictly academically analytic; its purpose is to form a working definition for the purpose of furthering analysis, not to become mired in debates concerning master definitions.

Spaaij[29] defined lone wolf terrorism as: "… terrorist attacks carried out by persons who (a) operate individually, (b) do not belong to an organized terrorist group or network, and (c) whose modi operandi are conceived and directed by the individual without any direct outside command or hierarchy."[30] It is functionally very similar to Weybrecht's though Weybrecht's is stated in a more down-to-earth fashion. Additionally, the term "lone wolf" is used by U.S. law enforcement agencies to refer to "individuals undertaking violent acts of terrorism outside of a command structure."[31] Thus, the conventional wisdom is that although lone wolf terrorists may share ideological convictions or a philosophical identification with a terrorist group, lone wolf terrorists share these commonalities with terrorist groups, devoid of actual communication with these organized groups, and without command or direction from that group. Hence, the term is almost stereotypically commonsensical: A lone wolf operates in isolation from a pack. "While the lone wolf's actions are motivated to advance a certain group's goal, the tactics and methods are conceived and directed solely by the individual, without any outside command or direction."[32] As we shall later see, this apparent conventional wisdom needs to be at least nuanced, for example, in relation to Colleen LaRose and the Tsarnaev brothers. This is not to say that the characterization of the "lone wolf" or self-radicalizing terrorist above does not apply at all to any of the case studies presented in this book, but that a careful scrunity of these examples helps us understand how the binary implicit in the term "lone wolf" needs to be problematized, in order to comprehend how in each of their cases, the shift from radical thought to radical action occurred.

Offering an even more complex schema, Rafaello Pantucci offered a typology of lone wolf terrorists, grounded upon the means and context of

self-radicalization, their tactics of engagement, and the framework of available support.[33] Pantucci's schema nuances the contrast between lone wolf terrorists and organized terrorist groups, but essentially maintains the binary between functioning as a lone wolf or operating within a pack. In Pantucci's schema, there are four categories: (1) the "loner terrorist" who is connected to the terrorist group merely superficially, by passively consuming terrorist information from the internet, or from other sources at large in society; (2) "lone wolf terrorists" who, although they may interact with a terrorist organization virtually in communications that show a command and control structure, operate individually in the real world; (3) "lone wolf pack terrorists" involving groups, rather than individuals, who self-radicalize, and then seek to join the jihad, but not for immediate operational purposes; and (4) "lone attacker terrorists" who are individuals who operate alone, but nevertheless have clear command and control terrorist groups—in effect, they are essentially one-man terror cells. As we shall see in Chapter Two, even with this analytic parsing, it is difficult to press, for example, Colleen LaRose, an aspiring assassin, into a simple mold, as she moved fluidly across a number of the categories, depending on the time period in which one plots her activities. Perhaps the Tsarnaev brothers can be characterized as "lone wolf pack terrorists" but certainly, Tamerlan's pathway towards radicalization was markedly different from Jahar's, as Chapters Three and Four illustrate in depth. Nevertheless, one thing is clear: "lone wolves are not alone. They are linked, networked or communicated with through the internet."[34] This is why the role of the internet, in relation to the self-radicalization of "lone wolves" or "self-radicalizing" terrorists, is of crucial import.

Perhaps a more accurate description, particularly within the current evolving American context, where more attacks are occurring within the U.S. by isolated, disgruntled individuals who are "inspired" rather than directed by global radical jihadi movements is one proposed by Fred Burton and Scott Stewart, which is: "a standalone operative who by his very nature is embedded in the targeted society and is capable of activation at any time."[35] This certainly would fit Omar Mateen and Jahar Tsarnaev (though as Chapter Four shows, the extent to which he was a leaderless agent is problematic), and to some extent, probably Tamerlan Tsarnaev and Syed Rizwan Farook (although both did travel overseas and have actual contact with jihadi extremists, unlike Mateen, so both could not be described as purely "standalone" agents). One would have difficulty applying it strictly to Colleen LaRose because she was not initially embedded in her "targeted society," Sweden, though she did have the blonde hair and the green eyes to fit in, and she certainly had the

general support of a terrorist cell, though she tended to exercise much more autonomy than most recruited women are allowed. Further data is still forthcoming on Tashfeen Malik, Syed Rizwan Farook's Pakistani-born wife, so it is wise not to make conclusions about how independently orchestrated her actions were; furthermore, a detailed analysis of the San Bernardino shooters is beyond the scope of this book.

To close, Grace Parker, an Intelligence Officer for TAM-C Solutions, based in Jerusalem, Israel, proposes substituting "lone actor" for "lone wolf" because "the term lone wolf implies a romanticized notion of a cunning predator with sophisticated wherewithal to exact terrorist ends."[36] While such a renaming is logical, it misses an essential point this book makes: that the appeal of "jihadi cool"-ness precisely relies on the propagation and intensification of this romanticized view through media and internet depictions. Furthermore, the term "lone actor" appears relegated purely to academic discussions on the topic, and unfortunately, does not have much currency beyond that. This book thus continues to use the terms that seem to have the most currency and seem to be being used generally interchangeably: "lone wolf terrorists," "self-radicalizing terrorists," and "self-activating terrorists."

## The Rhetorics of Monstrosity and Coolness in Relation to Lone Wolf Terrorism and Its Development

The rhetorics regarding terrorism, especially in relation to lone wolf terrorists, are rich with "monster talk."[37] Terms like "lone wolf" or "silver bullet"[38] form an implicit analogy between the "self-radicalizing" terrorist and the werewolf. Furthermore, the breadth of technological advances, and the porousness of borders, in relation to the internet, adds a further transmogrifying dimension to the characterization of the self-radicalizing terrorist.[39] It is important to understand the dynamics of these rhetorics of monstrosity, as they function in conjunction with their paired "others"—such as the rhetoric of "jihadi cool" or "jihadi chic," as we shall later see.

Clearly, the language used by then-President Bush's speech in the fall of 2006, in the aftermath of 9/11, set up much of the current rhetorical dynamics.

> The terrorists who attacked us on September the 11th, 2001, are men without conscience—but they're not madmen. They kill in the name of a clear and focused ideology, a set of beliefs that are evil, but not insane… They're driven by a radical and perverted vision of Islam that rejects tolerance, crushes all dissent, and justifies the murder of innocent men, women and children in the pursuit of political power. They hope to

establish a violent political utopia across the Middle East, which they call a "Caliphate"—Where all would be ruled according to their hateful ideology.[40]

By using such absolutist terms, the speech effectively divided the world into good (the U.S. and allies of the U.S.) and evil (enemies of the U.S., broadly termed "terrorists"). It also left little room for anything save an all-out campaign for the total destruction of those designated "evil"—a thoroughgoing militant rhetoric that mimed the violent fundamentalism of Osama Bin Laden.[41] "Rather than countenancing the possibility that certain of its actions might have fueled resentment toward it, it divided the world into good and evil"—effectively precluding any American actions not directed at absolute victory over terrorism writ large.[42] As early as 2006, predictions regarding a shift in recruitment tactics and the rise of self-radicalizing terrorists emerged: "Officials worldwide have been preoccupied for more than two years by a fear of terror groups consisting of 'self-starters'—men who become radicalized on their own and decide to conduct operations without the support of an extremist network or with only tenuous connections."[43]

Clearly, rhetorical forms impact and shape public policy and the way in which, in this case, self-activating terrorists or lone wolf terrorists are perceived as a public menace. Lone wolf terrorists are perceived as particularly dangerous for a number of reasons: their ability to think outside the box; their looser affiliation with organized terrorist movements, making their movements harder to track, anticipate, or arrest; their decisions regarding the level of violence they wish to achieve, which are unconstrained by the desire not to alienate supporters; and their easy access to self-radicalizing material and technologies of mass violence.[44]

This book draws, to some extent, from my prior work on the use of "monster talk" as a form of public preachment,[45] but as applied specifically, for example, for the purposes of conciseness and clarity, to the formation and radicalization of an American self-radicalizing/activating terrorist, Colleen LaRose (Jihad Jane), among other detailed case studies. Crucial to this analysis is the distinction between radicalization of thought and radicalization of action, as a theoretical rhetoric of radicalization does not automatically convert into a rhetoric of radical action.[46] In Colleen LaRose's case, the shift from a radicalization of thought to a radicalization of action entailed an abrupt shift rather than a gradual evolution, partially due to the dynamics of the rhetorics of "jihadi cool" or "jihadi chic." Arguably, the internet plays a crucial role in this galvanization of monster talk into monstrous action,[47] as it provides the means through which a lone wolf may first self-radicalize through some imaginary or sympathetic

connection with an organized terrorist network. In addition, interaction through the internet allows a self-radicalizing terrorist to move into the stage of radical violent action, by not only providing the lone wolf with a medium for self-justification and communication, but also a source for relatively inexpensive and more unpredictable technologies of mass destruction.

Nevertheless, it is important to map exactly when, in the process of "self-radicalization," the internet comes into play. It is also important to track exactly what functions the internet takes on in this conversion of "monster talk" to monstrous action. This is necessary in order to avoid the impression that the internet is an uncontrollable source of a "phantom menace," but rather, is a communications network that serves multiple functions.[48] Along an intersecting track, Robin L. Thompson argues that social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are effective tools for radicalization because of their ubiquity and reach, among other reasons; however, Thompson also argues that national security communities, by becoming more involved in social media, can potentially understand how radicalization occurs and implement effective responses.[49]

While this book agrees with Thompson's position that the internet does play a crucial role in the movement from radical thought to radical action, it differs in emphasis and on asserting a clear cause-and-effect connection, as there are many other factors that come into play contextually. Like Randy Borum, given the complexity of how radicalization occurs, this book prefers a pragmatic, multi-spectrum approach, seeing theories as potential tools to achieve a more sophisticated understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Quoting Cable *et al.*, Borum cautions:

> Rather than seeking some single model of activist recruitment and commitment, consisting of structural and/or social psychological variables…, analysts should assume that there are multiple models and then get on with the more useful work of specifying the conditions under which one or another is more appropriate.[50]

Two senior intelligence analysts in the New York City Police Department, Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt, developed a four-stage model to conceptualize the transition from radical thought to radical action.[51] The model was developed from performing comparative case analyses of homegrown terrorist plots planned and/or enacted by terrorists in countries as diverse as Spain, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada[52], and within the U.S., in places as diverse as Portland, Oregon; Lackawanna, New York; and Northern Virginia.[53] This model became "widely understood and accepted as the model for

understanding and informing training and strategies for law enforcement officials in dealing with cases of terrorism."[54] Despite crucial issues associated with the model, such as the potential of reductively linking criminal behavior to racial and ethnic groups as a "terror checklist,"[55] Silber and Bhatt's model did provide a practical heuristic as a starting point for analyzing the transition from radical thought to radical action, as evidenced, for example, in the development of an F.B.I. forensic psychologist's analogous four-step heuristic model of radicalization.[56] So although this book does begin by mapping LaRose's transition from radical thought to radical action using Silber and Bhatt's four-part model, it does nuance what appears to be a simple and linear process to describe a complex set of interacting factors, avoiding reductive oversimplifications, and certainly steering clear of the discrimination-based and warrantless surveillance practices that led to the New York Police Department's settlement of two law suits in January, 2016.[57] The principal Constitutionally-based objections to Silber and Bhatt's model have been, in practice, its focus on investigating Muslim communities for possible terrorist links simply because they were Muslim (a clear violation of First and Fourteenth Amendments), and the way it seemed to be being interpreted as an "escalator" or a "religious conveyor belt"[58] model – that once the process began, it was simply a matter of time before stage four would be reached. This books shares none of those assumptions, and points out precisely the pragmatic difficulties inherent in assuming an "escalator" or "religious conveyor belt" model. Indeed, the case studies presented show that the reductive predictions embedded in the "escalator" model do not work, save for, for example, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, who fits the model relatively well, though as this book emphasizes, the process by which radical thought converts into radical action is a fluid and multi-faceted process. The majority of the case studies show that the model, to be useful, may be used carefully to plot a rough guide to investigation or analysis, not as a predictive tool, based purely upon religious affiliation. Indeed, the use of this data as a simplistic checklist is fraught with danger because as Matt Apuzzo points out:

> As a practical matter scientists note, checklists are mathematically certain to fail. . . in a country with a huge population and a tiny number of terrorists, even a nearly perfect test would flag many more innocent people than actual terrorists.[59]

Silber and Bhatt characterized the Radicalization Process in four stages: (1) Pre-Radicalization; (2) Self-Identification; (3) Indoctrination; (4) Jihadization.[60] The first stage is the Pre-Radicalization Phase, in which

individuals live "ordinary" lives, and usually have no criminal history. Then, something tragic acts as a catalyst, causing these individuals to become alienated or disassociated from general society. These traumatic, catalytic events could range from losing a job, undergoing a divorce, a tragic accident, or a death in the family, among others.[61]

Such traumatic events leave a void, which must be filled, either by seeking spiritual guidance, for example, or integration into a group. This finding of a new "home" constitutes the second stage, Self-Identification. Although the forging of such new identities or memberships can be sought out in new physical spaces such as in mosques or schools, where radical imams preach, more often, the most typical venue these days is virtual, through the internet, where anonymity appears to provide a measure of security. Thus, self-radicalization occurs technically at this stage, when an individual begins to seek out jihadist websites, for the purpose of filling such a spiritual void through establishing imagined relations with a virtual community.

Nevertheless, it is usually interaction with members of a virtual community that cements stage three—Indoctrination.[62] Social media serves to create a loose virtual community of radical mentors and likeminded extremists, who provide resources, support, and communication, thus furthering the individual's conversion to radicalization, and strengthening imagined ties to this loose, virtual community. Indeed, a May 2008 report by the Senate Homeland Security Committee concluded that the internet "play(s) a critical role throughout the radicalization process" because it is the principal medium through which potential self-activating terrorists can discover radical jihadi propaganda, become converted, and become connected with "the global Islamist terrorist movement."[63]

Once the individual's indoctrination has moved from radical rhetoric to the rhetoric of radical action, the individual has reached stage four—Jihadization, in which self-radicalized terrorists "accept their individual duty to participate in jihad and self-designate themselves as holy warriors or mujahideen," actively planning, preparing for, and executing terrorist attacks.[64] As we shall see, although this four-stage model has a heuristic value in chronicling, and analyzing, how Colleen LaRose became a lone wolf terrorist, applying the model is not a simple, linear and reductive process. Depending on the complex interaction of particular factors at play, and the specific individuals involved, if full radicalization is achieved, the movement across the four stages can occur gradually and indiscernibly, or can entail sudden shifts—the latter of which seems to be the pattern in LaRose's case.

Rather than assuming a cause−effect connection between internet radicalization and terrorist action, it is important to plot the nature of the interaction between radicalization of action (monstrous action) and mere exposure to jihadi sites on the internet. One key issue this book raises is whether exposure to such radical jihadi sites, alone, is necessary or sufficient to catalyze terrorist action. Summarizing, for example, Marc Sageman on the difference between American and European reactions to jihadi sites: American individuals "read and chat about the global jihadi terrorist ideology on the Internet, just like their European counterparts. Yet for most American Muslims, the terrorist message does not become a catalyst to terrorist action as it does for their European counterparts, since it does not resonate with their beliefs or personal experiences."[65] Another corollary question this monograph examines is whether there is a causal correlation between radicalization of action and several individual factors, such as structural or personality factors, social identity, among others. Nevertheless, the principal focus of this book remains the shift from radical thought to radical action, with the rhetorics of monstrosity and jihadi coolness being crucial factors. A parallel study could be Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller's inquiry into processes of radicalization that escalate into violence, as opposed to others that do not; Bartlett and Miller also cite the importance of thrill, excitement and coolness as factors that aid in the escalation to violent action.[66]

Mohamed Abdul Saddiq uses monster talk in fleshing out his theory of how lone wolf terrorists become what they are. He describes internet users who, through exposure to the contagion of radical jihadi sites and chatrooms, become "mindless automatons."[67] Rather than assume a framework in which "addicts" and "zombies" transmogrify into self-radicalizing terrorists solely by virtue of their exposure to radical sites (imagery that is ripe with what I call "monster talk" in the next section), this book focuses on detailed case studies of individual factors and motivations, rather than terrorist networks. Nevertheless, as this book argues, one crucial catalyst that converts a radicalization of thought to a radicalization of action is the rhetorical allure of jihadi cool/jihadi chic.

## The Rhetorics of "Jihadi Cool" or "Jihadi Chic"

### *The Genesis and Evolution of "Jihadi Cool"*

The terms "jihadi cool" or "jihadi chic" have been much used in the media of late, especially with the beheading of American photojournalist James Foley by "Jihadi John," identified by the British M15 to be former

London rapper, Abdel-Majed Abdel Bary.[68] Mumbai-born British author Salman Rushdie expressed fears that the language of "jihadi cool," propagated through Twitter and YouTube, was seducing young British Muslims to join the "decapitating barbarism"[69] of ISIS (an acronym for "Islamic State in Iraq Syria," also alternatively termed "Islamic State in the Levant" or "Islamic State in al Sham").[70] Rushdie defined "jihadi-cool" as "the deformed medievalist language of fanaticism, backed up by modern weaponry" and opined that "[i]t's hard not to conclude that this hate-filled religious rhetoric, pouring from the mouths of ruthless fanatics into the ears of angry young men, has become the most dangerous new weapon in the world today."[71] In a similar vein, House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Mike McCaul (R-Texas) raised concerns about the sufficiency of the Obama administration's response to emergent threats from "the 'jihadi cool' subculture—young individuals influenced by the sophisticated propaganda campaigns of Muslim extremist groups such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula."[72] Similarly, Major General Michael K. Nagata focused on the Islamic State's "magnetic attraction" as a key to understanding, and destabilizing, its rhetorical campaign online; he stated: "I want to engage in a long-term conversation to understand a commonly held view of the psychological, emotional and cultural power of I.S. [Islamic State] in terms of a diversity of audiences . . . They are drawing people to them in droves. There are I.S. T-shirts and mugs."[73]

The term "jihadi cool" was originally coined by psychiatrist and former CIA operations officer, Marc Sageman, to describe al-Qaeda's growing influence on the internet.[74] Despite the prevalence of monstrous metaphors pointing to an utterly foreign menace infecting or seducing American or British men, the concept of "jihadi cool" probably began with Adam Yahiye Gadahn, an American raised in a goat farm in Riverside County, who spent some of his teenage years with his Jewish grandfather in Santa Ana.[75] Gadahn left for Pakistan in the 1990s, and emerged around 2004 on propaganda videos as an English-speaking spokesman for al-Qaeda.[76] Although Gadahn's early videos as "Azzam the American" were viewed as more "laughable" than "scary," these rough productions were nevertheless noted as among the first English-language radical jihadist propaganda efforts attempting to reach out to Western audiences.[77]

Additionally, the slick website of Revolution Muslim became a precursor of what has evolved into the look of "jihadi cool." Over an 18-month period, this small New York-based organization peaked, until government officials arrested one of its leaders and shut down the

website.[78] Revolution Muslim was created by three American converts to radical Islam, all of whom are serving prison sentences.[79] At the height of its popularity, the website was used by authorities to monitor the communication, recruitment and activities of aspiring radical jihadis.[80]

With the shutdown of the Revolution Muslim website, *Inspire* magazine, an online publication run by the group al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula targeting English language speakers, moved in to fill the gap.[81] Described as akin to "the *Sports Illustrated* of jihad," this magazine has published articles such as that giving instructions on creating explosive devices, a copy of which was found in the backpack of one of the Tsarnaev brothers.[82]

One of *Inspire* magazine's most recent productions, the *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook*, produced in Spring 2013, advertises itself as "A Step to [sic] Step Guide on How to Become a Successful Lone Mujahid."[83] The issue clearly targets would-be American jihadis, and employs hip, fashionable language conventions as well as rap lingo to tantalize and inundate its audience with tips, strategies, and incitement to commit acts of terrorism. For example, the cover of that issue drew in its potential readers with the lines: "R U dreamin' of wagin' jihadi attacks against kuffar? … Well, there's no need to travel abroad, coz the frontline has come to you. Wanna know how? Just read 'n' apply the contents of this guide which had practical 'n' creative ways to please Allah by killing his enemies 'n' healing the believers' chests."[84] The contents reprise many of *Inspire's* first ten issues, such as "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of your Mom" and the "Ultimate Mowing Machine."[85] Deploying everyday items such as sugar, motor oil or pressure cookers, and systematically detailing tactical details such as different types of bombs, areas most vulnerable to a mass attack, and methods of maximizing mayhem, the issue seeks to convert its everyday audiences into radical jihadi warriors. "Mixing religious devotion with a desire to be cool in the MTV generation, the magazine offers an attractive picture for jihadi wannabes, perhaps inspired by the mass popular appeal of rapping gang-bangers who make gun violence 'cool.'"[86]

Yet even *Inspire's* glossy and sophisticated manipulation of the media has been eclipsed by ISIS's deft deployment of social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, which feature items as diverse as graphic videos to T-shirts[87] featuring ISIS's logo, which is a black flag.[88] Former Director of the National Counterterrorism Center Michael Leiter acknowledged that ISIS "is using more social media than al[-]Qaeda ever did."[89] Similarly, according to Staffan Truve, an analyst with Recorded Future, a non-government entity that monitors Twitter and other social media, in

summer 2014 alone, more than 60,000 internet accounts expressed positive sentiments regarding ISIS extremists.[90] An even larger number can be extrapolated by multiplying that figure by an average account's tweets, combined with the group's deft use of other social media, inclusive of the Android app; Truve estimates that "hundreds of thousands of people are receiving the Islamic State message."[91] The imagery Truve uses, in describing ISIS's carefully tailored global recruitment campaign, is reminiscent of a mythological hydra—cut one head off, and another blooms to rear its deadly head: "Every time a pro-IS Twitter account is closed, another one almost immediately takes its place."[92] Furthermore, ISIS has taken "jihadi cool" to new merchandising extremes: it now features its own online clothing line run by a company, Zirah Moslem, which specializes in ISIS-themed T-shirts and hoodies, sold via websites in Indonesia, where it is legal to sell jihadi-themed products.[93]

## Explaining the Seductive Appeal of "Jihadi Cool"

How does one explain this upsurge of "jihadi cool" popularity? One factor appears to be the seductive appeal of being a "badass." As UCLA sociologist Jack Katz noted: "In many youthful circles, to be 'bad,' to be a 'badass' or otherwise overtly embrace symbols of deviance is regarded as a good thing."[94] Katz identifies three stages of aggression that a badass aspirant must undergo and become, in order to become initiated into the ranks of the truly "badass." First, he must be tough and morally impermeable—not someone who can easily be influenced by others. Second, he must appear alien—uncompromisingly "hostile to any form of civilization" and irreducible to anything comprehensible to "native sensibilities," resulting in his presence or acts as "unnerving."[95] Third, and ultimately, to be a "badass" requires a genuine meanness, or spontaneous ability to engage in acts of violence, devoid of considerations of either utility or self-preservation; "badasses manifest the transcendent superiority of their being, specifically by insisting on the dominance of their will…".[96]

Perhaps the seduction of "jihadi cool" is simply the paradigmatic appeal of the "badass" given a jihadi mask. As Simon Cottee observes: "The paradigmatic badass is still with us, only now he doesn't have a gangster face; now he has a jihadi face. For the ultimate badasses are the caliphate-invoking, kafir-hating, sword-wielding men in black of Islamic State. This is in no way to glamorize the group. But it may be the key to understanding why some young men from the West give up everything to join it or affiliated groups."[97]

However, a second—and, to some extent, contrary explanation—is the success of promoting a romanticized notion of making one's mark on the world through adventure, linked with a promise of earthly pleasure—to which allure the badass is theoretically immune, with his imperviousness, toughness and meanness. This notion, the idea of a "five star jihad," appears to have two components: (1) the allure of celebrity and (2) the attractions of living in luxury while being "virtuous." Lorne Dawson, a University of Waterloo sociologist, theorized that "our celebrity-obsessed culture pushes youth to define who they are at ever earlier stages. There is this onus on kids to create themselves. They're trying to figure out 'how can I be special?'".[98] This image of celebrity comes with stereotypes of necessary luxury. Hence, internet images aimed to recruit U.K.-born Islamic warriors showcased jihadis "lounging in a well-appointed home with laptops and game systems."[99] For example, reading a Tumblr account of what young British jihadis can enjoy once they penetrate Syria's borders (through a bribe), gives one the impression they have achieved the (masculine) earthly version of paradise; not only do they enjoy houses with "5+ bedrooms with swimming pools, *etc.*" but also "junk food and sweets, training with a wide range of weapons, internet, phones, cheeseburgers lol [sic] pizza [not 'foreign muck like tabbouleh or hummus'], kebabs, markets, schools for children, classes for adults, shariah courts…".[100] And if weapons, food, and Brotherhood are not enough, calls for fresh recruits throw in additional tantalizing hooks: "There are plenty of women here waiting to be married; waiting to bare [sic] the offspring of the army of Imam Mehdi by the will of Allah and there is honour for the Muslims here."[101]

There are numerous accounts of young jihadi warriors posting "selfies" of themselves glamorously atop tanks and brandishing guns, or showing some heartwarmingly human aspect. One such internet celebrity is a Dutch national of Turkish descent, who engages in the armed struggle against the Syrian regime, called Yilmaz.[102] After the photo-sharing site Instagram closed his site, Yilmaz migrated to Tumblr, a blogging platform favored by jihadi warriors eager to boast of their feats in battle.[103] Some of Yilmaz's popular photos include one of himself tenderly cradling a Syrian toddler swathed in pink, and another of himself, immortalized in the quintessential warrior pose, dressed in a black jacket and camouflage, with one leg propped up and his rifle by his side.[104] Yilmaz's self-promotion paid off: not only did he develop a following among Syria watchers, but he also achieved a presence in international news when the *New York Times* blogged about him.[105] Like other Hollywood celebrities, he uses social media to make sure his fan base remains secure; he deploys the ask-

and-answer forum platform of Ask.fm to answer fan questions about his grand adventure.[106] Hardly surprisingly, his success has spawned imitators— "Other jihadis emulated him, posting photos of themselves on Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms looking happy and relaxed, pointing fingers in the air and casually slinging guns or other weapons."[107] The ripple effects are clear, pointing to the power of jihadi cool. In an interview with Dutch TV show *Nieuwsuur* in 2014, where Yilmaz is shown leading new recruits in target practice in a bleak Syrian field, Yilmaz opined that "90 percent of [the recruits] have never even fired a bullet in their lives, let alone [fought] on an actual battlefield."[108]

## *Analyzing the Rhetorical Mechanics of "Jihadi Cool"*

Very clearly, part of the reason why the "jihadi cool" message is so popular among particularly young men is its careful tailoring and understanding of its targeted audiences. A CIA report states that approximately 2000 Westerners have joined the ranks of the radical jihadi fighters in Iraq and Syria, with at least 500 from the United Kingdom and more than 700 from France.[109] Both the look and the content of "jihadi cool" were crafted principally by American radical jihadi converts Anwar al-Aulaqi, a New Mexico-born Muslim cleric based in Yemen; Omar Hammami, an Alabama native who rose to become a senior commander in Somali and starred in a rap recruiting video, which became an internet sensation, in which Hammam led an armed group of fighters to a catchy musical beat; and Adam Gadahn, a native Californian who became an al-Qaeda spokesman and was charged with treason in 2006, among others.[110] "Can you imagine [Ayman al-] Zawahiri or [Osama] bin Laden doing a rap video? That is something that people without the same connection to America or the West would have a harder time pulling off," proclaimed David Kris, Assistant Attorney General for national security.[111] Both the ability to communicate in the American vernacular in a manner that appeals to the youth, as well as a command of what it takes to create an MTV aesthetic, are crucial components of jihadi cool's rhetorical persuasiveness. Videos created specifically for Western audiences try to depict jihad as a "Hollywood-like video game."[112] Quoting Patrick Skinner with the Soufan Group, a security intelligence services company:

> They make jihad seem cool, not over the top—beheading videos aren't recruitment videos—but they do do very slick productions, with music overlaid on top of very slick graphics, and they make it seem like a video game. They don't show the after effects. They'll show an attack or they'll