



## NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE FOUNDATION

### STRATEGIC TRENDS

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#### EMERGING CHALLENGES

##### **Islamic radicalism risk in the USA: after San Bernardino**

The December mass shooting in San Bernardino, California (mass shooting is considered as such when four or more victims die or are injured), where 14 people were killed and 21 others were injured, shows a trend in home grown terrorism in the USA (Little Rock, 2009, Fort Hood, 2009 and Boston, 2013). In the case of San Bernardino the act was directly influenced by ISIS. The attackers, Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife Tashfeen Malik, led seemingly normal lives and were well integrated in the US.

This seems to be the typical profile of around 25.000 or more foreign fighters from more than 100 countries who have joined Daesh and other jihadist groups in Syria. Many of these fighters grew up in prosperous, democratic countries.

According to the report *ISIS in America, From retweets to Raqqa*, published by The George Washington University, Dawla related mobilization in the United States has been

unprecedented. US authorities estimate that there were about 250 Americans who travelled or attempted to travel to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS and some 20 of them have died.

Fifty six individuals have been arrested in 2015, a record number of terrorists-related arrests since 9/11. The profile of individuals involved in ISIS related activities in the U.S. differ widely in race, age, social class, education and family background.

As opposed to the terrorist attacks perpetrated on U.S. soil before 9/11, which were lead by foreign citizens with tourist or commercial visas, the latest attackers are US citizens. At the same time, the mass shooting in San Bernardino raises again the issue of weapons detention in the USA.

In fact, the San Bernardino attackers had legally acquired weapons as did many other attackers connected to radicalism and fundamentalism. And the problem is that the other mass shootings with ordinary criminal background feature a total of 229 incidents against one with terrorist background (death toll 354 people, i.e. a 25 factor compared to San Bernardino).

As opposed to other cases of violence, the link between the San Bernardino attackers and global jihadism leads politicians and citizens to demand a stronger reaction from the US government than ever before. The violent extremism of jihadist inspiration is not a new phenomenon in America but the home-grown, self-radicalised extremists pose a new challenge. In fact, even if the number of American ISIS sympathizers on social media and twitter seems to be small, it is very difficult to predict and prevent the point at which an extremist becomes violent and takes up arms against the nation in which he or she was born.

Since there is no standard profile of ISIS American recruits, it is necessary to find a global counterterrorism strategy that can provide more result than solely law enforcement which is vital but insufficient. Detaining or imprisoning terrorist suspects could lead, as was demonstrated in Iraq and Afghanistan, to greater levels of radicalism.