The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) is a U.S. Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence based at the University of Maryland.

START uses state-of-the-art theories, methods, and data from the social and behavioral sciences to improve understanding of the origins, dynamics, and social and psychological impacts of terrorism. For more information on START, please visit http://www.start.umd.edu/.

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In August 2011, the Human Factors/Behavioral Sciences Division of the Science and Technology Directorate and the Homegrown Violent Extremism Branch of the Office of Intelligence and Analysis at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security jointly organized an event entitled “Understanding the Threat: Perspectives on Violent Extremism.” START researchers Jarret Brachman, Jeff Gruenewald, John Horgan and Stevan Weine were featured at the event, which was designed to foster dialogue between researchers, intelligence analysts, and counterterrorism practitioners.

START director Gary LaFree received the Dean's Medal, the highest honor bestowed by the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the University of Maryland. Recipients of this award are members of the college community with an outstanding record of sustained contributions marked by a dedication to the fulfillment of the college's goals and missions, professional accomplishments and service.

This summer, START launched a new project designed to examine the characteristics of counties in the United States that experience the highest (and lowest) levels of extremist violence. A multidisciplinary research team will work together to specify the degree to which extremist violence has occurred in each of the 3,143 counties in the United States. The project will also identify the geographic areas from which perpetrators of extremist violence have come and where terrorist groups have based their operations. This three-year study is being supported by the Human Factors/Behavioral Sciences Division, Science and Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Erin Miller, Global Terrorism Database (GTD) Program Manager, conducted a webinar on June 29 as the official launch to the newly updated GTD, which now includes 98,000 cases of terrorist attacks that have occurred around the world from 1970 through 2010. Unlike many other event databases, the GTD includes systematic data on domestic as well as international terrorist incidents, making it a valuable tool for both researchers and policy makers.

START-affiliate Bert Useem testified in front of the House of Representatives Homeland Security Committee on June 15 during its second in a series of hearings related to radicalization and Muslim-Americans. This hearing was entitled “The Threat of Muslim-American Radicalization in U.S. Prisons” and examined the degree to which U.S. prisons serve as fertile ground for recruiting Muslim Americans to engage in violent extremist activity against the United States.
Catastrophe and Catalyst Recap

Nearly a decade has passed since the attacks of 9/11. To mark this important historical occasion, START hosted its premiere event “Catastrophe and Catalyst: 10 Years Since 9/11” on Thursday, Sept. 1, at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Nearly 200 people, representing the public policy, academic and media communities, as well as members of the general public, attended the sessions.

Event highlights included:
- Senator Joseph Lieberman keynote address on violent Islamic extremism
- Two START researcher panels focused on radicalization and resilient communities
- A debate on safety since 9/11
- A panel of former radicals discussing lessons learned from their pathway out of extremism

“Catastrophe and Catalyst brought together some of the best minds in the field of terrorism studies and policy to participate in engaging and thought-provoking discussions about the implications of 9/11,” said Gary Ackerman, START Research Director.

Panelists and presenters included:
- Gary Ackerman, START
- Arif Alikhan, National Defense University
- Peter Bergen, New America Foundation and CNN
- Jarret Brachman, Cronus Global
- Martha Crenshaw, Stanford University
- Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Foundation for Defense of Democracies
- Gary LaFree, START
- John Horgan, Pennsylvania State University
- Arie Kruqlanski, University of Maryland
- Peter Neumann, Kings College London
- Fran Norris, Dartmouth College
- Stevan Weine, University of Illinois, Chicago

“Sharing START’s research with policymakers, government officials, think tank leaders and interested citizens in unique and engaging ways is key to ensuring our work makes an impact,” said START Director Gary LaFree.

To watch the recording of the event, go to http://www.c-spanvideo.org/videoLibrary/event.php?id=196967

Photos by Heather Behlendorf
START Interns: Driven and Diverse

Interns are the engine of much of START’s research, providing invaluable support to a number of projects. This summer nearly 60 interns from across the country worked for START.

“We had some amazing interns this summer,” said John Sawyer, START Program Manager and Senior Researcher. “There were several projects that wouldn’t have gotten completed without their help. They made it a lot of fun coming into work.”

START’s research center provided an opportunity for students to study terrorism, counterterrorism and political violence through a number of research projects. Students were able to apply data to simulations and real-life occurrences and analyze terrorism policies.

Among the 58 summer interns, 32 were University of Maryland, College Park students. Other universities represented include American, East Carolina, John Jay, and Vanderbilt. Students worked up to 40 hours a week for college credit.

Kevin LaCherra, a junior at the University of Maryland, College Park studying Government and Politics and History with a Terrorism Studies Minor, noted that what he valued most about his internship experience was the trust and initiative placed on students.

“This was my first internship and the experience I gained within the first few weeks was like nothing I could have anticipated. My supervisors put a level of trust and demanded a level of initiative that’s rare for an undergraduate experience,” said LaCherra.

The different internship projects included:

- Global Terrorism Database (GTD)
- Minorities at Risk Organizational Behavior (MAROB)
- Counter Measures against Extremism and Terrorism (CoMET)
- Influencing Violent Extremist Organization (I-VEO)
- Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO)
- Special Projects

For information on internships opportunities, visit [http://www.start.umd.edu/start/education/research_support/internships/](http://www.start.umd.edu/start/education/research_support/internships/)
START has released a number of new data collections responding to some of the most relevant questions in today’s study of terrorism. Utilizing the Dataverse Network Project, these data collections analyze and code information on terrorism, conflict and preparedness. The Dataverse Network Project is housed at the Institute for Quantitative Social Science (IQSS) at Harvard University and is an open-source application for citing, publishing and researching data.

Currently, the START Dataverse includes the following datasets:

- Minorities at Risk Organizational Behavior (MAROB) Middle East, 1980-2004
- Big Allied and Dangerous (BAAD) Database 1-Lethality Data, 1998-2005
- Muslim Public Opinion on U.S. Policy, Attacks on Civilians, and al Qaeda
- Public Opinion in the Islamic World on Terrorism, al Qaeda, and U.S. Policies
- Public Warnings and Evacuations: A Study of the 2009 California Station Fire
- The Youth, Emotional Energy, and Political Violence: The Cases of Egypt and Saudi Arabia

Users can read over information about each dataset regarding its time period, geographic coverage and sampling procedure. Additionally, the system allows users to download codebooks, data collection instruments and data, which provide an interface for START researchers. Data can be recoded directly on the START Dataverse website.

New datasets are added periodically and they are announced on the START homepage. For those interested in the available datasets, visit the Data Collections tab on the START homepage. More information can be found at http://www.start.umd.edu/start/data_collections/.
Research Spotlight: Influencing Violent Extremist Organizations (I-VEO)

START contributed to the Influencing Violent Extremist Organizations: Planning influence activities while accounting for unintended side effects (I-VEO) project undertaken as a Strategic Multilayer Assessment initiative funded by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and STRATCOM. START was tasked with providing support to current efforts to understand the levers of influence that governments can exert over violent extremist organizations (VEOs).

Methodology:
Task 1: The project team was tasked with identifying, collecting, and organizing all theoretical knowledge relevant to influencing VEOs, as well as analyzing the degree to which such knowledge had received theoretical support.

Task 2: In the parallel task, the team was tasked with identifying influencing factors, patterns and effects, both intended and unintended, of influence operations against VEOs through an empirical analysis of the historical record.

Conclusions:
The combined tasks produced a wealth of information meant to inform the model for the broader I-VEO project. Task One provided an overview of scholarly literature related to influencing VEOs. The assessment indicated many gaps that future research should address. Task Two demonstrated that a variety of influence operations can be highly successful. In addition, such operations often produce a host of unexpected consequences, some of which are positive, but most of which are negative.

Deliverables from this project included:
• 190 micro literature reviews that assess a broad scope of theoretical literature related to influencing VEOs;
• The Knowledge Matrix, a tool which allows for easy access to both the breadth and depth of information; and
• 75 empirical case studies, based on 8 conflict clusters, that identify causal relationships that affect outcomes of operations meant to influence VEOs.

For more information about START research projects, visit http://www.start.umd.edu/start/research/projects/
Articles & Book Reviews


Book Chapters


LaFree, Gary. 2011. “Generating Terrorism Event Databases: Results from the Global Terrorism Database.” In Evidence-Based Counter Terrorism. New York, NY: Springer.


Books