START Highlights

START Highlights showcase recent accomplishments of START researchers and students.

Spring 2010

As part of a research team including the University of Arizona and SUNY-Albany, START was awarded a project by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency examining new analytic methods for the exploitation of open-source structured databases to enhance situational awareness for effective counter-WMD strategies.

In March, START successfully launched its new, fully online Graduate Certificate in Terrorism Analysis. The first course in the series, Terrorist Motivations and Behaviors, was taught by START Investigator Anthony Lemieux of Purchase College. The next course in the series, Societal Impacts of and Responses to Terrorism, will be taught by Jeanette Sutton of the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. Applicants can still apply and enter the program at this point, and applications are due by May 15, 2010. For more information on the Graduate Certificate in Terrorism Analysis, see [http://www.start.umd.edu/start/education/graduate_certificate/](http://www.start.umd.edu/start/education/graduate_certificate/).

Steven Chermak of Michigan State University was awarded additional funding from the Academy of Critical Incident Analysis to create an open-source database of correctional incidents involving extremists. Professor Chermak is co-lead with Joshua D. Freilich of John Jay College of the Extremist Crime Data Base, a project supported by START and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

START Released a Background Report on Terrorist Attacks in New York City in response to the failed car bombing in Times Square on May 1. START Director Gary LaFree served as a valuable resource for media, for policy-makers, and for concerned citizens trying to put this latest attempted attack into context. The report was cited by the New York Times, CNN, Los Angeles Times, and Associated Press, among others. For more information on the background report, see page 5.


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Six New START Curriculum Units Available to Interested Instructors

START is pleased to announce the release of six newly developed curriculum units, in line with START’s Research Agenda.

These units were developed by START researchers for use by instructors in courses designed to teach students about the human causes and consequences of terrorism and about conducting scientific research in this field. These curriculum units reflect START’s educational priorities, including:

• Presentation of cutting-edge START research;
• Interactivity and novel approaches to teaching;
• Interdisciplinarity, with the goal of challenging students to engage in critical, cross-disciplinary discourse;
• Scalability to different education levels (e.g., K-12, undergraduate, graduate, executive education); and
• Immediacy and impact, with a focus on attention to problems and issues of immediate relevance to national and international policy.

Curriculum units include customized PowerPoint presentations, suggested readings for instructors and students, recommended in-class and longer-term assignments, and a guide for integrating the unit into courses.

Available units include:

• “Networks and Preparedness” Christine Bevc, PhD Student, Department of Sociology, University of Colorado
• “Online Simulation Modeled on November 2008 Mumbai Attacks” Bidisha Biswas, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Western Washington University
• “Conducting Field Research Outside the United States and in Difficult-to-Access Communities” Shawn Flanigan, Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, San Diego State University
• “Engaging and Countering the Social and Cultural Mechanisms used by Organizations to Motivate Suicide Attackers” Jeffrey Lewis, Lecturer, Department of History, The Ohio State University
• “Terrorism and International Negotiations in Kurdistan” Katherine Izsak, Assistant Director for Education START, University of Maryland, and Tim Wedig, Former Simulation Developer, International Conflict and Negotiation (ICONS) Project, University of Maryland
• “What Can Oral Histories Tell Us About September 11?” Christine Muller, PhD Student, American Studies, University of Maryland

For more information on any of the classroom units, see http://www.start.umd.edu/start/education/curriculum_materials/. The curriculum materials are freely available to interested instructors, and the materials for each completed unit can be requested by emailing education@start.umd.edu.
The START project, Communities Advancing Resilience Toolkit (CART), used field testing, factor analysis, key informant interviews, and emerging literature to revise and refine CART, a theoretically grounded assessment process designed by Betty Pfefferbaum (University of Oklahoma), Rose Pfefferbaum (Maricopa Community College), and Fran Norris (Dartmouth College) with support from START in order to support community-level efforts to examine and enhance their capacity to be resilient to potential catastrophic events, including terrorist attacks. The CART suite includes a survey assessment instrument and focus group script to guide a process for enhancing community resilience through strategic planning.

In this project, researchers conducted a critical review of the scientific literature on resilience to identify core considerations that bolster potential for resilience. These identified community attributes include:

- Connection and Caring
- Resources
- Transformative Potential
- Disaster Management

The current CART survey assessment instrument consists of 21 core community resilience items along with demographics of respondents and additional questions dealing with issues of particular interest to participating organizations. The survey can be administered in person, over the telephone, by mail, or online. Results are used to develop a community profile from the perspective of respondents.

CART focus groups typically involve a blend of community leaders, neighborhood groups, selected professionals, and/or representatives of community organizations. CART participants are surveyed prior to focus group meetings in which results are discussed. As part of strategic planning, participants explore the community resilience domains in application to specific local concerns.

CART is not a mechanism for ranking or comparing communities. Rather, CART provides a snapshot of strengths and challenges that are meaningful for the particular community and organizations participating in the CART process. The process engages community organizations in collecting and using assessment data to develop and implement strategies for building community resilience to disasters.

CART is designed to stimulate communication, analysis, and action and to contribute to community participation and collaboration, community self-awareness, critical reflection, and skill development. Thus, CART is as much a method as a measure.

Community leaders interested in applying the CART process in their communities are encouraged to contact the leaders of this project; Betty Pfefferbaum at Betty-Pfefferbaum@ouhsc.edu or Rose Pfefferbaum at rose.pfefferbaum@pcmail.maricopa.edu.
START Background Reports

START supports a wide-range of long-term research projects. Through its new Background Report series, START is compiling information from these projects to present insights directly relevant to national and world events, with a goal of presenting these insights in a timely and accessible fashion to help position events and incidents in a larger context. Information on START’s most recent Background Reports is provided below.

Background Report: Terrorist Attacks in New York City
On the evening of Saturday, May 1, 2010, police in New York City’s Times Square neighborhood discovered a private vehicle on West 45th Street, between Seventh Avenue and Broadway, filled with explosive materials. At the time police discovered the vehicle—with the assistance of an astute street vendor working in the neighborhood—the device had apparently begun to detonate but did not explode. This event is being treated as a potential terrorist attack, with a full investigation underway. The report below provides background information on the history of terrorist attacks in New York City since 1970, using data drawn from START’s Global Terrorism Database (www.start.umd.edu/gtd).

On April 19, 1995, a bomb exploded at the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, home to offices of a range of Federal agencies. 168 people were killed in this attack, and over 650 were wounded. At the time of this attack, this event marked the most deadly and destructive act of terrorism ever experienced in the United States.

START released a background report including information specific to Oklahoma City, as well as trends related to:

- Terrorist attacks in the U.S. from 1970 - 2007
- Individual vs. group perpetrators
- Percent of U.S. terrorist attacks by individuals pre- and post - Oklahoma City
- Number of attacks by groups in the U.S.
- Law enforcement victims of far-right homicides in the U.S.
- Government facilities as terrorist targets in the United States and worldwide
- Terrorist usage of IEDs in the U.S. and Worldwide

Background Report: On the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Oklahoma City Bombing
On April 19, 1995, a bomb exploded at the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, home to offices of a range of Federal agencies. 168 people were killed in this attack, and over 650 were wounded. At the time of this attack, this event marked the most deadly and destructive act of terrorism ever experienced in the United States.

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START provided a number of panel presenters and moderators for the Fourth Annual DHS University Network Summit. With more than 1,000 attendees, his year’s summit focused on Community Resilience and how Science and Technology can assess and improve resilience. It also featured a Research Innovation Showcase that gave each DHS Center of Excellence an opportunity to demonstrate the tools and technologies they have developed through their research.

Plenary: What Makes a Resilient Community?
This panel featured researchers, like Norris, representatives from DHS S&T’s Human Factors Behavioral Sciences Division, and homeland-security professionals working to develop strategies to enhance community resilience, all discussing what it means for a community to be resilient in the face of a threat, and what can be done prior to an emergency situation to ensure that a community has the resources and capacities to withstand and recover successfully from a disaster event.

- START Panel Member: Fran Norris, Dartmouth Medical School

Breakout Session: Community Resilience as a Function of State and Local Government
This panel explored the key components of community resilience, with an emphasis on which components can most effectively be fostered by state and local governments. In particular, the panel explored what roles and functions state institutions have adopted in efforts to support resilience, preparedness, and safety, as well as what leaders in one specific component of the public sector—K–12 education—have done to enhance both institutional and community resilience.

- START Moderator: Gary LaFree, START
- START Panel Members: Sabrina Mattson, University of Colorado (Boulder) Rose Pfefferbaum, Phoenix College Mark Tompkins, University of South Carolina

Breakout Session: Terrorism Trends: Understanding Threat to Enhance Resilience
This panel presented state-of-the-art research on the nature of that threat by identifying trends in terrorist activity in the United States from 1970 to the present. In addition, the panel examined emerging terrorist threats related to the possibility that terrorists might employ nuclear and/or radiological weapons in an attack. Finally, the panel explored how effective counterterrorism measures can mitigate these threats and serve to enhance resilience. Expanded understanding of the nature of past, present, and future terrorist activity in the United States, and abroad, should inform decisions at both national and local levels about what actions and investments need to be made to enhance resilience to potential terrorist threats.

- START Moderator: Kathleen Smarick, START
- START Panel Members: Gary Ackerman, START Rebecca Denning, Griffith University (Brisbane) Gary LaFree, START

The 5th Annual DHS S&T University Network Summit will be held in Washington, D.C. the week of March 28 – April 1, 2011.
In April, Jessica Stern, a leading expert in terrorism studies, presented the most recent START Seminar. Stern is a faculty affiliate of the Belfer Center’s International Security Program and a Lecturer in Public Policy at the Kennedy School at Harvard University.

Stern began the seminar by pointing out that although there are no clear root factors of terrorism, risk factors can be identified. International, national, and individual-level risk factors have been investigated as predictors of terrorism with mixed results. At the international level, terrorist leaders have been able to describe a humiliation of Islam by the West as one risk factor. At the national level, poverty should not be completely ignored as a risk factor. In impoverished countries, terrorism can be a high paying job especially for youth growing up in states of conflict such as Iraq. At the individual level, there are spiritual, emotional, and material risk factors for radicalization—including instances of personal humiliation and an individual’s search for a new identity. Stern suspects that humiliation, especially sexual humiliation or trauma at a young age can be an important risk of factor that social scientists should consider.

In her presentation, Stern noted that Jihad can be an occupation for the unemployed or underemployed... sometimes seen as fashionable or glamorous. Worthy of considering, though, is that most Jihadists aren’t practicing mainstream or traditional Islam, and most don’t have formal religious training.

Stern emphasizes that there has to be a reason why one brother becomes a terrorist and one becomes a priest, and that we need to look at the individuals to study this angle. She also questions the findings that there are no psychological difference between radicals and non-radicals. Stern encouraged continued research in this area and advocated for researchers to re-think the methods that they are using to examine individual-level differences among people who have grievances but who have very different attitudes towards the use of violence to address those grievances.

Many countries have de-radicalization programs, designed to instill among radicals a reduced willingness to engage in violence and, at times, designed to try to change the attitudes and beliefs of individuals engaged in terrorist movements. According to Stern, Saudi Arabia’s is the most comprehensive, including religious education, psychology, psychiatry, art therapy, career counseling, and surveillance. They report a success rate in the 80-90% range, although this has not been confirmed. De-radicalization programs in Iraq also seem promising and have had strong positive impacts up to this point. However, there is a need for social science evaluations of counter-radicalization programs.

Stern stressed that de-radicalization does not imply a change of view, but more of a change in behavior. If the radicals have changed their behavior, is it really possible or necessary to change their views?

Stern considers prevention and social welfare at the individual level as the most effective means of preventing terrorism, although she said that this is not a complete solution. Early intervention and prevention has been shown to be effective with gangs. Stern suggests considering applying lessons from gang research to radicalization. The model that has been followed to this point of hunting down the killers one by one only works if there’s a finite number of killers and you know where to find them.

"Why Radicalize?"
START Seminar with Jessica Stern

Jessica Stern

“In impoverished countries, terrorism can be a high paying job.”
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