

ISIS Zeros in on Heartland of America

The Islamic State has engaged in a reign of terror across the Middle East, raping, pillaging and beheading its way to a new caliphate.

Now a growing number of U.S. citizens are leaving America to join the brutal ISIS army. These recruits are being radicalized on U.S. soil and they may eventually return home.

It's hard to imagine America's heartland as a breeding ground for terrorism. Yet when news emerged that two U.S. citizens had been killed in Syria fighting alongside ISIS, the path led back to of all places Minnesota.

The two men were part of a growing number of young Muslims from Minneapolis and St. Paul who have answered the call of jihad ("holy" war). At least a dozen young Muslims from the Twin Cities area have left their homes to travel to the Middle East and join ISIS. Some of them worshipped at the al-Farooq Mosque in a quiet suburb of Minneapolis. An Egyptian-American man allegedly recruited young Somali Muslims from the mosque and helped send them to Syria.

Mosque officials say they banned Amir Meshal earlier this year when they learned he was preaching jihad. The suspected terror recruiter remains at large. "There is an organization that makes this happen," former sheriff Bob Fletcher told CBN News. "But usually there is one principal person that I call "The Guide" that can take this person in this ideological state and guide them to Syria or wherever it might be."

Fletcher is the former sheriff of Ramsey County, which includes the city of St. Paul. He now works with Somali leaders to battle radicalism in their Twin Cities community that's seen dozens of young men travel overseas in recent

years to join terrorist groups.

"They need to procure travel documents; they need to raise money, usually somewhere in the area of \$4000-\$5000 to help facilitate all the travel that takes place and plus, they want to have money," Fletcher explained.

"And they need to make sure someone is purchasing the tickets—that requires a credit card of some sort. And they need a driver and a facilitator to get them to the airport because they need to make sure they get on the plane versus not getting on the plane," he said.

The recent deadly attacks against Canadian soldiers and the Canadian parliament by ISIS sympathizers were another reminder of the chaos that just a handful of terrorists can cause on Western soil.

It's estimated that as many as 3,000 Western passport holders from places like Britain, France, Germany and the United States are fighting for the Islamic State.

FBI Director James Comey and Attorney General Eric Holder both said recently that 12 Americans are fighting alongside ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Other Obama administration officials have said that at least 100 U.S. citizens overall have traveled to Syria to join terror groups.

According to Rep. Tim Bishop, D-N.Y., up to 40 of those American jihadists have already come home.

"It is also believed that some 40 of those who left this country to join up with ISIS have now returned to our country. Those 40 are under FBI attention and surveillance. So they are known and they are being tracked by the FBI," Bishop reportedly said. One suspected American jihadist the FBI is tracking starred in a recent propaganda video entitled "Flames

of War,” in which he executed British troops.

“We’re here in the 17th division military base, just outside of al-Raqqa,” the American jihadist says in the video. “And we’re here with the soldiers of Bashar. You can see them now digging their own graves in the very place where they were stationed.” A major concern is that ISIS recruits will return to the United States and carry out attacks here.

Fletcher says ISIS sympathizers on U.S. soil who have never traveled overseas but were self-radicalized at home may be the more immediate threat.

“I think it is a far greater concern that people that are here and radicalized [and] that haven’t gone back might strike out against America. And the numbers of people that are here and haven’t gone back that ideologically feel the same is significantly large,” Fletcher said.