

# “ISIS in Brooklyn”: US Media Inflate Threats With “ISIS Plots” Which Don’t Actually Involve ISIS

By [Adam Johnson](#)

Global Research, April 02, 2015

[Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

*Last Friday, the FBI [announced](#) another harrowing, 11th-hour capture of Americans plotting to join “ISIS” and launch attack within the United States. The case of two Illinois men, Army National Guard Specialist Hasan Edmonds and his cousin Jonas Edmonds, ostensibly involved the former going to Syria to join ISIS there while the latter stayed in the US, plotting to attack “scores” at a military base.*

Right on cue, the American media publish dressed-up FBI press releases about the “disrupted” plot, complete with balaclava-wearing [stock photos](#): “FBI Disrupts Plot to Kill Scores at Military Base on Behalf of Islamic State” was the **Washington Post**’s headline ([3/26/15](#)).

These outlets, as usual, omitted the rather awkward fact that this “ISIS plot” did not actually involve anyone in ISIS: At no point was there any material contact between anyone in ISIS and the Edmond cousins. There was, as the [criminal complaint](#) lays out, lots of contact between the Edmond cousins and what they *thought* was ISIS, but at no point was there any contact with ISIS—the designated terror organization that the US is currently launching airstrikes against.

This distinction may seem like semantics, but it’s actually quite important when trying to accurately inform the public—only [40 percent](#) of whom read past the headlines—about the reality of the ISIS threat vs. the fear-inducing media spectacle that [so often inflates it](#).



ANDREA MITCHELL REPORTS, 3/26/15, 12:39 PM ET

## National Guard soldier, cousin charged with ISIS plot

03/26/15 02:58 PM

**MSNBC** reports an “ISIS plot” that never was.

While less sensational press like the **Washington Post** and the **New York Times** are careful to avoid calling the sting operations “ISIS plots,” many outlets turn misdirection to explicit misrepresentation: This **MSNBC** headline ([3/26/15](#)) is fairly typical of how the reader is misled into thinking ISIS is actually involved in these arrests:

### National Guard Soldier, Cousin Charged With ISIS Plot

The Edmond cousins weren’t actually charged with an ISIS plot. They were charged with *attempting* to hatch an ISIS plot, but they are not accused of having any contact with ISIS whatsoever.

In a political environment where only a [slight majority](#) (54 percent) currently support the ongoing war effort against ISIS in Iraq and Syria—and soon [potentially dozens](#) of other countries—this sleight-of-hand has subtle but tremendous propaganda value. The specter of ISIS constantly trying to enlist dozens of Americans, often for attacks on US soil, is a crucial element in maintaining the current war effort. The media’s inability to point out that these “plots” are almost always entirely of the FBI’s making helps perpetuate the illusion and inflate perceived risk.

John Knefel [noted recently](#) in the **New Republic** ([3/24/15](#)) the gap between our perception of the ISIS threat and the reality:

The likelihood of Al Qaeda or ISIS launching a massive attack inside the United States is “infinitesimal,” [according](#) to the **Washington Post**, yet a recent poll found 86 percent of Americans now [see](#) ISIS as a threat to U.S. security.

That perception, however, is based largely on a myth. The Triangle Center’s [report](#) states that publicly available information does “not indicate widespread recruitment of Muslim-Americans by transnational terrorist

organizations to engage in attacks in the United States, or sophisticated planning by the handful of individuals who have self-radicalized.”

CONSPIRACIES - PLOTS

## The lure of ISIS: Feds catching more Americans trying to aid terror groups in Iraq, Syria

Published December 16, 2014 · FoxNews.com

443 358 3051



Shown here in these file photos are Maïd Elgeesh (left) and Michael Wolfe, both were accused of trying to support the Islamic State. (Reuters)

Politics Video

Contrary to **Fox News**, these suspects were not lured by ISIS, but by the FBI.

This trope is also present when reporting on the much-hyped “ISIS social media” army. In a piece headlined “The Lure of ISIS,” **Fox News** ([12/16/14](#)) used two cases, that of Abdella Tounisi and Basit Javed Sheikh, as evidence of Syrian jihadists’ social media appeal—without mentioning that fact that both men, according to the FBI’s own complaints, interfaced almost entirely with FBI-created “jihadi” social media:

The cases involve individuals from all across the country, from Florida to Minnesota to Colorado. They underscore the challenge US law enforcement continue to face, as well as the global reach of recruiters and propagandists from ISIS and other groups.

But the case of Tounisi and Sheikh cannot “underscore the global reach of ISIS recruiters and propagandists,” since the only recruiters and propagandists these men met online were the FBI’s “OCE”—Online Covert Employees. In the case of Abdella Tounisi, the FBI went so far as to create an entire fake Al-Nusra website, complete with a fake Al-Nusra training video and a fake Al-Nusra email list, as the [DOJ’s complaint explained](#).

Basit Javed Sheikh, the 29-year-old North Carolina man, was duped using an FBI-created “Al-Nusra” **Facebook** page set up by a female FBI employee posing as an “Al-Nusra nurse” in Syria. The “nurse” persona would have other social media accounts, as well as an “Al-Nusra” **Facebook** page complete with extremist messages, videos, pictures and content—all [created by the FBI](#).

Would Tounisi and Sheikh have sought other “recruiters” online? It’s impossible to say. (Also important to note that Sheikh had fallen in love with the “Al-Nusra nurse” FBI persona, who allegedly promised him marriage in Syria.) But what is clear is that FBI-created extremist social media isn’t evidence that extremist social media is helping recruit Americans for ISIS or Al-Nusra. But media treat FBI ruses that simulate terrorist activities as evidence that the crimes the FBI is ostensibly seeking to prevent are actually happening.



The New York **Daily News** ([3/9/15](#)) would take this perverse logic to a comical extreme last

month with this goofy headline:

ISIS was not, of course, in Brooklyn. FBI agents posing as ISIS were. This isn't a matter of emphasis—it's a matter of reality.

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