

Case 71: Ciccolo

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Alexander Ciccolo, the son of a Boston police captain from Adams, Massachusetts, had been mentally ill since childhood. As a teenager, he had been prescribed medication, but, notes Maria Chabali, it is unclear whether he continued taking the medication into adulthood. He also had a record of alcohol abuse.

In 2012, he converted to Islam and became obsessed with the religion although he seemed to develop few, if any, connections to anyone in the Muslim community. He soon became convinced that his faith was under attack, and he came to imagine, or to consider, himself to be a member of ISIS. Alarmed by his messages and Facebook postings, his father alerted the FBI. Surveillance was begun, and an informant was put on the case.

Working with the informant, Ciccolo decided to perform an attack of terrorism in the name of ISIS that would, in Chabali's words, "kill many, be broadcast on the internet, and gain a lot of attention." Searching around for targets, he eventually settled on a university cafeteria at lunchtime because it is "very sinful and has a crowd" and because he envisioned he could readily escape from the place after the deed was done—though he was apparently prepared to die in the effort if that's what it came to.¹

On July 3, 2015, he purchased a pressure cooker at Walmart and planned eventually to fashion it into a bomb—though there is no indication he had any bombmaking skills. In addition, he had two machetes, a long curved knife, and several partially constructed incendiary devices containing shredded Styrofoam which, soaked in motor oil, he envisioned would cause the fire from the exploded devices to stick to people's skin and make it burn better. But he also needed some firearms, or, as he put it, "The big thing is guns." With his medical history, it is unlikely he could have purchased any legally. On July 4, the informant obligingly supplied the 23-year-old with a .223 Colt AR-15 rifle, a 556 Sig Arms SG550 rifle, a 9mm Glock 17 handgun, and a 10mm Glock 20 handgun—though not with the ammunition Ciccolo had requested. Upon taking possession of the weapons, Ciccolo was arrested.² After he was arrested, Ciccolo stabbed a nurse in the head with a pen during a routine medical screening. It left a bloody hole in the nurse's skin and caused the pen to break in half.

For his deluded, if murderous, plotting, Ciccolo will likely spend a considerable amount of time in prison where, as Chabali suggests, he is unlikely to get the mental health care he so clearly needs.

¹ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo*, Detention Memorandum, United States District Court, District of Massachusetts, July 13, 2015, 18 USC 922(g), Case 15mj 3054-KAR, 5-6.

² *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo*, 5-8.

Case 71: Ciccolo

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1. Overview

On July 4, 2015, Alexander Ciccolo, the son of a Boston Police Captain, was arrested by undercover FBI agents in western Massachusetts walking home to his apartment in possession of firearms. Ciccolo's father had alerted the FBI of his twenty-three-year-old son's suspicious behavior about a year before his arrest after receiving strange text messages from him alluding to his support of ISIS, and the FBI had been watching him after that. Ciccolo had a history of mental illness and had lost almost all contact with his family except for the messages sent to his father. He was plotting to bomb a cafeteria of an unnamed state university during lunch hours when it would be most crowded. He had toyed with a few other targets, such as a bar and a police station, for his attack, but decided on the university because of an easy escape route and the ability to watch the attack happen. It was also a good target for him because it would be full of what he called "sinful" college students. He would commit this atrocity in the name of ISIS, a foreign terrorist group. He had joined the church of Islam, and it had become obsessed with it in the eighteen months prior to his arrest. The FBI successfully worked undercover with Ciccolo to discover his plan and arrested him a day after he purchased pressure cookers from a Walmart. He is currently being held without bail in the Franklin County correction center.

2. Nature of the adversary

Alexander Ciccolo is a white 23-year-old, a son of a Boston police officer from Adams, Massachusetts.¹ He was living alone in an apartment in Adams² in which he was storing weaponry.³ It is unclear what level of education he had received and whether he had a job.

Despite his rather normal demographics, he was mentally ill, considered himself to be a member of ISIS, and was "obsessed with Islam."⁴ Ciccolo's mental issues started at a young age with his parents' divorce and their custody battle over him.⁵ He was six at the time, and his mother received primary custody of him until his father petitioned for custody seven years later because he noticed Alexander's mother wasn't getting him the help he needed. He received psychological care in his teens. He caused a lot of problems in school and was arrested in December of 2005 for threatening to kill another student with a

¹ Joe Dwinell, "Son of Boston Police Captain Charged in Pro-ISIS Plot," *Boston Herald*, July 13, 2015.

² John Hayward, "Boston Police Captain's Son Indicted for Islamic State Plots," *Breitbart News*, July 2, 2016.

³ Harvey Silverglate, "FBI Overreach? Alexander Ciccolo And The Line Between Imagined And Actual Threat," *WBUR*, July 21, 2015.

⁴ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo*, Detention Memorandum, United States District Court, District of Massachusetts, July 13, 2015, 18 USC 922(g), Case 15mj 3054-KAR.

⁵ Hayward, "Boston Police Captain's Son Indicted for Islamic State Plots."

butterfly knife. Following this incident, he moved in with his father but continued to have behavioral problems. On his 14th birthday, he had a “violent and destructive outburst” for which he was put into psychiatric treatment. As a teenager, he was prescribed medication for ADHD, but it is unclear whether he continued taking the medication into adulthood.⁶

He had been a part of a “peace walk” in 2012 and soon after turned on his family and converted to Islam which became an obsession of his, especially in the eighteen months before his arrest.⁷ Ciccolo apparently had a closer relationship with his mother than with his father.⁸

He had also been engaged to a woman named Nicolette Baboolal who lives in Trinidad and Tobago. She disagreed with Ciccolo’s violent views and talk of war and “threatened to end their relationship. Law enforcement found Skype conversations between the two where she had written, “Your whole motto is kill kill kill kill...That is worrying behavior,” just four months before he was arrested.⁹

There also may have been another person involved. The informant said that, according to the informant in the case, Ciccolo claimed that one other person knew of his plans of attack.¹⁰

Ciccolo went by a different name, Ali Al Amriki (his name on Facebook), and was watched by the FBI after his father tipped them about his possible association with ISIS.¹¹ In February 2015, six months before his arrest, Ciccolo was put on probation for operating a vehicle under the influence of alcohol. He apparently had a long history of mental illness and alcohol abuse. A friend of Ciccolo’s said that Ciccolo believed that the “faith is under attack” and that he “wasn’t afraid to die” for the cause.¹² He had also received text messages from Ciccolo calling America “Satan” and Americans disgusting. This same friend had reported that Ciccolo had told him he wanted to go overseas and fight for ISIS in Syria or Iraq. Ciccolo had pictures of himself on Facebook showing him “strengthening” himself with a machete in his hand.¹³ Before the attack, Ciccolo told the informant that he had grown up with guns and knew what he was doing. He also expressed his happiness with a Tunisian beach bombing that ISIS had taken credit for where close to forty people were killed.¹⁴ One of the spots he thought about targeting was a bar near a university that he found to be celebrating the Supreme Court’s decision allowing same-sex marriage and said it “supports

⁶ “Mass. Terror Suspect Had Troubled past,” WFXT, Cox Media Group, July 16, 2015.

⁷ Hayward, “Boston Police Captain’s Son Indicted for Islamic State Plots.”

⁸ Silvergate, “FBI Overreach?”

⁹ Hayward, “Boston Police Captain’s Son Indicted for Islamic State Plots.”

¹⁰ Milton J. Valencia, “FBI Seeks Access to Ciccolo’s Skype Records,” BostonGlobe.com, April 4, 2016.

¹¹ Dwinell, “Son of Boston Police Captain Charged in Pro-ISIS Plot.”

¹² Brian Ross, Michele McPhee, and Brian Epstein, “Alexander Ciccolo, Cop’s Son Arrested in Alleged Terror Plot, Appears in Court,” ABC News, July 4, 2015.

¹³ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo*.

¹⁴ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo*.

the faggot so even better to destroy them.” This reveals his hatred for members of the LGBTQ community.¹⁵

Ciccolo was a very disturbed young man, a loner, a self-recruited member of ISIS, a nontraditional Muslim, and was very full of hate for those who didn’t believe in the same things as him.

3. Motivation

Ciccolo’s plot to bomb the university was motivated by his association with ISIS and inspired by the Boston Marathon bombing and the techniques used by the Tsarnaev brothers. He also expressed his happiness with a bombing by ISIS in Tunisia that happened just a week or so before his arrest.¹⁶ He wanted to bomb a college because it has sinful students and would have a large crowd.¹⁷ Ciccolo was a self-recruited member of ISIS and said that it is a “good thing,” brushing off videos of ISIS executions “by saying those suffering in ISIS videos are criminals.”¹⁸ He also said during a court hearing that “he supports the Islamic State and called the United States an enemy of Islam for failing to follow Sharia law.”¹⁹

In an online conversation with the cooperating witness on July 2, 2015, Ciccolo said, “Aihamdulillah (Arabic phrase for praise be to god), going well. I’m gonna send you link in shaa Allah (Arabic phrase for God willing).” He sent the agent a link to a Facebook page with a bar that he had previously targeted with a promotion applauding the U.S. Supreme Court decision allowing same-sex marriage. He messaged the cooperating witness saying, “That is our target. I collected a lot of info on this place. It is connected to the college and one of the most crowded places. It also support the faggots so even better to destroy them bi’idhnillah (Arabic phrase for with the permission of God).”²⁰ This is another example of hatred of a specific group of people that motivated him, although he did not follow through with this plan.

His Facebook profile revealed a lot about his motivations in relation to ISIS and about his allegiance to the church of Islam. He had made posts that showed his interest in “martyrdom for the sake of Islam.” He had also posted a photo of a dead American soldier captioned, “Thank you Islamic state! Now we won’t have to deal with these kafir (non-believers) back in America.”²¹ Clearly, Ciccolo had a lot of hate for Americans and anyone who didn’t believe in Islam. He claimed that the “faith was under attack” and he “wasn’t afraid to die” for Islam.²² His motivation, like that of ISIS, was to kill as many of these people as he could.

4. Goals

¹⁵ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo*.

¹⁶ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo*.

¹⁷ Dwinell, “Son of Boston Police Captain Charged in Pro-ISIS Plot.”

¹⁸ Ross et al., “Alexander Ciccolo, Cop’s Son Arrested in Alleged Terror Plot.”

¹⁹ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo*.

²⁰ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo*.

²¹ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo*.

²² Ross et al., “Alexander Ciccolo, Cop’s Son Arrested in Alleged Terror Plot.”

Ciccolo's intent was to attack the cafeteria of the university at lunchtime when it would be crowded in order to kill as many sinful college students as he could. The location changed from a police station to a bar and finally to a large state university that has gone unnamed.²³ He wanted to use a pressure cooker bomb like the one used at the Boston Marathon bombing. He was hoping, if successful, that his attack would be all over the internet and would make a big explosion, both physically and in the media.²⁴ His goal was to "ensure that there were a lot of people there and that he wanted the conditions to be right where he could see it with his own eyes." He had a lot of materials and was requesting some from the informant to try to make the explosion as big as possible. Ciccolo told the informant, "I have aerosol cans and propane tanks to maximize explosive power."²⁵ Overall, Ciccolo's goal was to perform an attack in the name of ISIS that would target non-Muslims, kill many, be broadcast on the internet, and gain a lot of attention.

5. Plans for violence

Ciccolo would use Molotov cocktail bombs "packed with shredded Styrofoam soaking in motor oil" that would "stick to people's skin." His targets would be the "sinful" college students at a state university during lunch hour to hit a large crowd.²⁶ Ciccolo had been experimenting with many weapons including pressure cooker bombs similar to those used during the Boston Marathon bombing and the Tunisian beach bomb attacks, and he had gathered supplies from a Walmart near his hometown. He told the undercover FBI agent that he was going to rob a gun store for firearms and go to a different state to purchase fireworks to get the black powder he would need for his bombs. He claimed that he had grown up with guns, saying "I know what I'm doing."²⁷

Ciccolo told the agent that the attack would occur before Ramadan was over and before the end of July of 2015. It would be during a busy hour, and he wanted to watch it happen. In an online conversation with the undercover FBI agent on July 2, 2015, Ciccolo said he would use two pressure cooker bombs which wouldn't be expensive, but the black powder would be. He said that the Tsarnaev brothers had spent around four hundred dollars on the explosives they used. During this correspondence, Ciccolo emphasized his need for guns and wanted the FBI agent to get those. He made a list of weapons he would need: four AK-47s, two sniper rifles, four handguns, gelignite, black powder, and improvised grenades. Later on that day, he said that his plan was progressing and his target had changed from the bar to the cafeteria because it is "very sinful and has a crowd" and has a better escape route.

The following day, July 3, 2015, Ciccolo purchased a pressure cooker from a Walmart in North Adams, Massachusetts.⁴ He instant messaged the informant that he had acquired it and said, "Allahu Akbar!!! (God is great)...I got

²³ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo.*

²⁴ Dwinell, "Son of Boston Police Captain Charged in Pro-ISIS Plot."

²⁵ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo.*

²⁶ Dwinell, "Son of Boston Police Captain Charged in Pro-ISIS Plot."

²⁷ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo.*

the pressure cookers today.”²⁸ However, no evidence of any powder that would be needed for a pressure cooker bomb was found in his apartment.²⁹

Ciccolo’s plan was stopped when he was arrested on July 4, 2015 for carrying weapons back to his apartment in Adams, Massachusetts. FBI agents arrested him after they found him carrying a duffel bag full of four weapons (a Glock 17, a Glock 20, a Colt-AR 15 rifle, and a SIGARMS Model SG550-1). These weapons had been provided by the FBI informant after Ciccolo had asked him to obtain them.³⁰ Then, in a search of his apartment, the FBI found more weapons, including partially constructed Molotov cocktails, two machetes, and a long curved knife, but not firearms. Ciccolo was detained for being a “danger to the community and a risk of flight.”³¹

Upon arrest, he waived his Miranda rights and continued to express his support for ISIS. He was put in the Franklin County correction center where he stabbed a nurse in the head with a pen, leaving a hole in her skin and breaking the pen in half. It was ordered that he be detained pre-trial because he was deemed a danger to the community and to ensure his appearance in court. The evidence against him points to the probability of conviction because of audio recordings from the FBI agent, possession of weapons, and his support of ISIS.³² Ciccolo’s lawyer tried to fight for him to be put on house arrest and live with his mother, but because of the danger of terrorism, this was unsuccessful. The judge held Ciccolo without bail because of his desire to join ISIS fighters abroad if he failed in the United States, and he still remains behind bars. He was officially charged with “possessing a firearm after previously being convicted of a crime punishable by a term of imprisonment exceeding one year.”³³ In late June of 2016, a new charge was brought against Ciccolo for “attempting to provide material support to the Islamic State terrorist group, as well as the attempted use of weapons of mass destruction.”³⁴ Ciccolo’s lawyer, David Hoose, continues to fight for him saying that “the FBI created the alleged terrorism plot by providing Ciccolo with weapons.”³⁵ It was the weapons the informant gave him that got him arrested in the end.³⁶ If Ciccolo is convicted for the attempted use of weapons of mass destruction, he “faces a sentence of life in prison, and a fine of up to \$250,000.”³⁷

6. Role of informants

Ciccolo’s father alerted the FBI about his son’s behavior about a year before his arrest, and this was when the FBI started watching him. Father and son didn’t have much of a relationship, and the captain said his son “was going off the

²⁸ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo*.

²⁹ “A Tale of Two Gun Possessions: Dylann Roof and Alexander Ciccolo,” Emptywheel, July 13, 2015.

³⁰ Silverglate, “FBI Overreach?”

³¹ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo*.

³² *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo*.

³³ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo*.

³⁴ Ross et al, “Alexander Ciccolo, Cop’s Son Arrested in Alleged Terror Plot.”

³⁵ Valencia, “FBI Seeks Access to Ciccolo’s Skype Records.”

³⁶ Silverglate, “FBI Overreach?”

³⁷ Hayward, “Boston Police Captain’s Son Indicted for Islamic State Plots.”

deep end and spouting extreme jihadist sympathies.”³⁸ He had received some strange texts from his son where Alexander called America “Satan” and expressed that he was “not afraid to die for radical Islam.”³⁹

The FBI worked with the Boston Joint Terrorism Task Force. They had someone working undercover, a cooperating witness, whom Ciccolo had propositioned to participate in a terrorist attack with him. It is unclear how they began their relationship or why Ciccolo trusted the undercover witness. They had a few meetings before his arrest that uncovered a lot of his plans. The informant proved to be central to the case.

In the first meeting on June 24, 2015, Ciccolo told the informant that he was planning to go to another state where he would conduct terrorist attacks on citizens, military members, and police officers. He said he would use pressure cooker bombs or portable microwave bombs to attack two different bars and a police station.

In their second meeting six days later, Ciccolo was asked if he had heard about what happened in Tunisia and thought it was “awesome” that close to forty people had been killed. During this meeting, Ciccolo made a list of the weapons he would need to conduct his attacks and showed the FBI agent the states he was planning to hit. He now expressed his desire to attack a state university using assault rifles and improvised explosives in the dorms and the cafeteria and wanted the attack to be broadcast on the internet. He said that he no longer planned to attack a police station, but the university instead because he would be able to kill many more people. If there was a Muslim student present, that student would be given the option to “help, sit tight, or leave.”

On July 2, 2015, Ciccolo and the informant had a conversation online about the attack. He said he was targeting a bar near a university and would still need the same weapons he had previously indicated. In reference to the bar, he messaged the cooperating witness, saying, “That is our target. I collected a lot of info on this place. It is connected to the college and one of the most crowded places. It also support the faggots so even better to destroy them bi’idhnillah (Arabic phrase for with the permission of God).” He also said the bar was in a good location because it was close to a military base and a state forest.

7. Connections

Ciccolo’s plan of attack was motivated by his imaginary association with ISIS. Ironically, it was on September 11, 2014, that Ciccolo’s told a friend that he wanted to go to Syria or Iraq to fight on behalf of ISIS. It seems that he was a self-recruited member and a photo on Facebook of him with his head covered holding a machete had the caption, “Another day in the forest strengthening myself” which shows that he had been attempting to train himself. On June 30, 2015, Ciccolo met with the informant where they spoke about a recent beachside bombing in Tunisia. Ciccolo stated that it was, “Awesome. Awesome, you know that ah, that brother in Tunisia was impressive...he got like 38, 39 people...one

³⁸ Hayward, “Boston Police Captain’s Son Indicted for Islamic State Plots.”

³⁹ Silverglate, “FBI Overreach?”

guy...that is a huge accomplishment I think.” ISIS ended up taking credit for this attack.⁴⁰

Ciccolo, for the most part, was working on his own. However, the informant said that Ciccolo had told him that another person knew of his plans for violence. Authorities requested access to Ciccolo’s Skype to see if they could find anything out about this in April 2016.⁴¹ Nothing has been found yet, and Ciccolo is the only one being charged in this crime. His association with ISIS was really something he took upon himself and there is no evidence of him having communicated with any real members of ISIS.

8. Relation to the Muslim community

Ciccolo informally joined the church of Islam, and a friend told the FBI that he “had become obsessed with Islam” in the eighteen months before his arrest. But no one else has been found to have been working with him. He seems to have been mostly practicing Islam on his own and did not attend Mosque. He didn’t seem to have had any Muslim friends or connections to anyone in the Muslim community.

9. Depiction by the authorities

Authorities emphasized the danger that Ciccolo posed to society. Assistant U.S. Attorney Kevin O’Regan said that Ciccolo “came under the sway” of ISIS, began to hate Americans, and started to take ISIS’s goals seriously and plan a violent terrorist attack.⁴² All the reports from the informant about his communications with Ciccolo are unarguably disturbing. He clearly wanted to kill a lot of people and was inspired by ISIS. Authorities really harped on the fact that his father was a police officer. To police officers, such an occurrence is alarming, sad, and an eye-opener: even their own children raised by someone whose job it is to uphold the law could fall into the ISIS trap.

10. Coverage by the media

This episode didn’t receive as much attention as a lot of other terrorist incidents by ISIS, probably because it was stopped before any damage occurred. Most of the news reports come from local Boston news stations and the case didn’t seem to receive much national, or any international, coverage.

There seem to be two sides to the coverage of this event. Some news sources use the fact that Ciccolo’s father was a police officer to show that even someone who has been raised in the home of someone whose job it is to protect the community could turn out to be a threat to it. Others emphasized that Ciccolo was inspired by the Boston Marathon bombing, which also ties this incident back to his father who was a first responder in that attack.

On the other hand, some news sources questioned Captain Ciccolo’s decision to tip off the FBI about his son. Harvey Silverglate of WBUR News, considers Captain Ciccolo’s decision to be a “betrayal of family values,” and

⁴⁰ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo.*

⁴¹ Valencia, “FBI Seeks Access to Ciccolo’s Skype Records.”

⁴² “Boston Police Captain’s Son Jailed.”

notes that in earlier times a parent in this situation “would have sought to have his child committed to a secure mental health facility for evaluation and treatment.” However, since father and son didn’t have much of a relationship, this might have been difficult to accomplish, and the Captain’s law enforcement background may have led him to believe that arresting him was the only solution. Silverglate also thinks that using an FBI sting in Ciccolo’s prosecution was a waste of taxpayer’s money and that the FBI worked as an instigator to encourage Ciccolo’s violence.⁴³

While both sides to the story have been told, most media reports drew attention to Ciccolo as a violent and disturbed danger to society rather than as someone who needs help with his mental disorder.

11. Policing costs

Much of the controversy related to the case has to do with the taxpayer dollars that went towards paying the FBI to watch Ciccolo, communicate with him, and prosecute him when he could have been committed to a mental health center instead.⁴⁴

The cooperating witness had been communicating with Ciccolo for about a year leading up to his arrest.⁴⁵ He was part of a Joint Terrorism Task Force used by the Springfield FBI to assist them in cases of terrorism and was formed shortly after 9/11. Officers on the task force come from police departments in the area where the force is located, and “work part-time or full time for the task force but are not paid a salary by the FBI. They earn their salary through their home departments, and the FBI picks up the bill for any overtime they work on task force investigations. The FBI also provides them with cars to use for task force business.” Departments can let their officers join the task forces as long as they have the resources because all it costs them is “the base pay for the individual.” All other costs are paid for by the FBI. Some of the actions performed by the force include “monitoring their social media accounts, looking into their backgrounds, and interviewing friends or relatives...conducting surveillance or executing a search warrant.” The task force employed all of these methods in their investigation of Ciccolo, including monitoring his Facebook page and organizing meetings with him where an undercover pretended to assist him in his plot.⁴⁶ Police officers are paid between \$30,000 and \$40,000 a year as their starting pay in North Adams, Massachusetts. It is unclear whether the officers working on the case were paid overtime. Considering that the task force officers spent about a year working on the case, paying at least two officers, using resources to investigate, and likely working some overtime, I would estimate that around \$100,000 was spent in the investigation of Ciccolo.

⁴³ Silverglate, “FBI Overreach?”

⁴⁴ Ross et al., “Alexander Ciccolo, Cop’s Son Arrested in Alleged Terror Plot.”

⁴⁵ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo*.

⁴⁶ Rebecca Everett, “Local Police Officers on FBI’s Western Massachusetts Joint Terrorism Task Force Work Daily to Investigate, Foil Suspected Terrorist Plots,” *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, July 27, 2015.

12. Relevance of the internet

ISIS has frequently recruited on the internet, spreading its “violent extremist ideology” and influencing members to commit attacks. ISIS has used social media to reach out to people in the United States and Europe to perform terrorist attacks. On Twitter, they have tweeted names of members of the United States military to direct members on who to attack.⁴⁷

Ciccolo used the internet a lot to express his views on ISIS. However, he never formally joined. His association with ISIS was completely on his own. In October of 2014, the FBI found his Facebook profile under the name of Ali Al Amriki where there were many indications of his desire to fight for ISIS, and he expressed his interest in martyrdom for Islam. It also included a photograph of a figure in a wooded area with a head covering holding a machete with the caption, “Another day in the forest strengthening myself.” He had also posted a photo of a dead American soldier with the caption, “Thank you Islamic State! Now we won’t have to deal with these kafir (non-believers) back in America.” When it came to his plan to attack the university, Ciccolo wanted the killing to be broadcast live on the internet.⁴⁸ Postings such as these were the ones that alerted his father who alerted authorities.

Authorities also started looking into Ciccolo’s Skype account in April after the informant reported that Ciccolo had told him someone else knew of his plans. Skype is another one of the social media outlets that ISIS is using increasingly to communicate with supporters abroad. The informant said that the account might contain “evidence, fruits, and instrumentalities of these crimes.” The affidavit also said that Ciccolo “discussed the idea of creating a local terrorism cell to carry out local attacks.” Ciccolo’s Skype username was Ali Al Amriki, the Muslim name he had taken on. The only conversations reported to have been found, however, were the correspondence between Ciccolo and his fiancé, Nicolette Baboolal, who denounced his “rants about war and violence.”⁴⁹

13. Are we safer?

While Ciccolo, a self-proclaimed supporter of ISIS was arrested and his plans of attack were stopped, there may still be many sympathizers of ISIS out there, likely in the United States, that haven’t been uncovered. While we are safe from Ciccolo, are we safe from all the others like him? Harry Silverglate believes that this is not a victory over terrorism at all, but instead a failure to treat a mentally ill young man.⁵⁰ He thinks that Ciccolo wasn’t a credible threat and now that he is in prison, he will likely never receive the mental healthcare that he needs.⁵¹ Ciccolo was working on his own and, therefore no other ISIS members were arrested in, or were relevant to, this incident. It seems that the FBI put a lot of time and effort into watching Ciccolo and sending an undercover agent in to

⁴⁷ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo.*

⁴⁸ *United States of America v. Alexander Ciccolo.*

⁴⁹ Valencia, “FBI Seeks Access to Ciccolo’s Skype Records.”

⁵⁰ Silverglate, “FBI Overreach?”

⁵¹ Silverglate, “FBI Overreach?”

communicate with him, while there were surely other more pressing and dangerous threats that they could have investigated.

However, Ciccolo was in possession of dangerous weaponry. Anyone with a mental illness pledging allegiance to ISIS should not have access to such weapons and this made him a credible threat. While he hasn't been sentenced yet, it is likely that he will be put away for quite awhile and, hopefully, by the time he is out of prison ISIS will no longer be around. Ciccolo was a vulnerable young man, who in his loneliness and troubled brain found shelter in ISIS and radical Islam. With the rise of ISIS, there has been heightened security and surveillance, and there are lists of people who are potential members and are being watched by the FBI and by task forces such as the one that worked to arrest Ciccolo. This specific incident along with many other ISIS threats or attacks should help our law enforcement officials to uncover and prevent more plots, making us safer as a whole. Hopefully, Ciccolo's arrest is a small, but positive, step in this direction.

14. Conclusions

This case is unique, and somewhat sad, in many ways. Much of the controversy has circled around Ciccolo's father's decision to have the FBI watch, and eventually arrest, his son instead of getting him psychological help. Ciccolo will surely be in prison for a long time where he will probably not get the mental health care he needs. While he had accumulated some weaponry, he had never performed any violent actions that had gotten him in trouble before, so we might never know if he actually had the capacity to go through with his violent plans. He was clearly a disturbed young man before the FBI got involved, but was he an actual threat or just living a fantasy in his disturbed brain?

He clearly had murderous goals, and the fact that he had obtained some weaponry on his own, even without the help of the FBI, would lead us to believe that he in fact presented a credible threat. And, if he can gather enough dangerous weapons and apparatus to create bombs that will kill, then so could others who have goals similar to his. How can sympathizers of ISIS in the United States and dangerous people in general be stopped from obtaining dangerous weaponry?

It also strikes me as interesting that Ciccolo's own father was the first to report him to the FBI. If Ciccolo was posting pro-ISIS posts on his Facebook page, weren't other Facebook friends (if he had any) seeing his violent posts supporting the Islamic State? Were all of his Facebook friends somehow associated with ISIS? How did this go unnoticed or unreported by so many?

Another facet of disagreement in this case is whether the FBI's involvement egged him on in planning the attack. The FBI knew of his dangerous plans. Why did it take them witnessing Ciccolo buying a pressure cooker and then taking possession of firearms to arrest him? Would he have continued to obtain the specific weapons he needed without the FBI giving them to him?

While Ciccolo's father has been at the center of this incident, his mother was only mentioned in a few news sources. Most reports said that Ciccolo had estranged himself from his family, but others said that he still had a close relationship with his mother. Did she see any warning signs from her son or was

she completely oblivious to his violent behavior? Why didn't she try to get him counseling or psychological care? Did she see his alarming Facebook posts?

The case has not been decided yet, and it is likely that these questions may never be answered because of their irrelevance to the crime. We can learn from this case that anyone can become a member of ISIS, or at least self-declare their association. Hopefully, law enforcement agencies can learn from this example and improve their methods for investigating potential members of ISIS to prevent more attacks from occurring. As citizens, we must remain alert and report anything that seems strange. Ciccolo's neighbors somehow didn't seem to think anything about him was strange since they never said anything and it took much work to finally arrest him.

It is safe to look at this case as a success because Ciccolo was stopped before he could do any damage, and many lives may well have been saved. As for Ciccolo's own life, he will likely never receive the mental help that he needs and will spend the majority of his life behind bars.