WHAT THE NEW ADMINISTRATION NEEDS TO KNOW
ABOUT TERRORISM & COUNTERTERRORISM

Hosted by:
The Center for Security Studies (CSS)
at Georgetown University’s Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service
and
The Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV)
at University of St Andrews, Scotland

Sponsored by the George T. Kalaris Fund for the Study of Intelligence
and
Published by the Georgetown Security Studies Review

Featured Authors:

Elizabeth Grimm Arsenault
Mark Currie
Paula Doyle
Richard English
Daveed Gartenstein-Ross
Hanin Ghaddar
Bruce Hoffman

Jytte Klausen
Diego Muro
Paul R. Pillar
Fernando Reinares
Sir David Veness
Michael Vickers
Tim Wilson

Edited by:
Robert Morgan Byrne-Diakun, GSSR Editor-in-Chief
Videos of the Conference:

To view the complete proceedings of the conference, including remarks by all participants and Q&A sessions after each panel, please visit the following link to the Georgetown University Center for Security Studies YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/user/GUSecurityStudies

Access the Georgetown Security Studies Review online at http://gssr.georgetown.edu
Connect on Facebook at http://www.facebook.com/GeorgetownUniversityGSSR
Follow the Georgetown Security Studies Review on Twitter at '@gssreview'
Contact the Editor-in-Chief at GSSR@georgetown.edu

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in Georgetown Security Studies Review do not necessarily represent those of the editors or staff of GSSR, the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, or Georgetown University. The editorial board of GSSR and its affiliated peer reviewers strive to verify the accuracy of all factual information contained in GSSR. However, the staffs of GSSR, the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, and Georgetown University make no warranties or representations regarding the completeness or accuracy of information contained in GSSR, and they assume no legal liability or responsibility for the content of any work contained therein.

Copyright 2017, Georgetown Security Studies Review. All rights reserved.
ISSN 2474-8552 (print); ISSN 2474-8560 (online)
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Introduction** ................................................................................................................. 3  
Bruce Hoffman, *Georgetown University*

**The Evolving Terrorist Threat and Counterterrorism Options for the Trump Administration** 6  
Bruce Hoffman, *Georgetown University*

**Perceiving the Shia Dimension of Terrorism** ................................................................. 15  
Hanin Ghaddar, *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*

**Global Trends in Terrorism** ............................................................................................ 20  
Sir David Veness, *University of St Andrews*

**Back to the Future: The Historian and the Threat Horizon** ........................................... 26  
Timothy Wilson, *University of St Andrews*

**What the Trump Administration Needs to Know: Lessons Learned from Fifteen Years of Counterterrorism Campaigns** ................................................................................................................. 34  
Michael Vickers, former Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence

**Violent Non-State Actors in the Age of Social Media: A Twenty-First Century Problem Requires a Twenty-First Century Toolkit** ................................................................................................................. 43  
Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, *Georgetown University/Foundation for the Defense of Democracies*

**The Myth of Homegrown Terrorism** ............................................................................... 50  
Jytte Klausen, *Brandeis University/Woodrow Wilson Center*

**The Political Economy of Terrorism in Europe: The Integration of Supply and Demand Side Approaches at City Level** ................................................................................................................. 61  
Diego Muro, *University of St Andrews*

**Jihadist Mobilization, Undemocratic Salafism, and Terrorist Threat in the European Union** 70  
Fernando Reinares, *Elcano Royal Institute/American University/Georgetown University*

**Trump Counterterrorism: The Five Foundations for Success** ........................................ 77  
Richard English, *Queen’s University Belfast*

**Law, Counterterrorism, and Intelligence Gathering: Recommendations for the Trump Administration** ................................................................................................................................................. 85  
Elizabeth GrimmArsenault, *Georgetown University*
Intelligence Challenges: An Historical Perspective ......................................................... 91
Mark Currie, University of St Andrews

Four Policy Actions Needed to Strengthen US and Coalition Efforts Against al-Qa’ida, ISIL, and Hizballah ................................................................. 98
Paula Doyle, Georgetown University

Terrorism and Current Challenges for Intelligence ......................................................... 108
Paul R. Pillar, Georgetown University

Photographs of Conference ......................................................................................... 112

Appendix: Acronyms and Transliteration .................................................................. 117
Introduction

Bruce Hoffman

On January 26 and 27, 2017, the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV) at the University of St Andrews, Scotland and Georgetown University’s Center for Security Studies (CSS) together convened a conference on “What the new administration needs to know about terrorism and counterterrorism.” This was the third in a series of joint events held at Georgetown’s Washington, DC campus since 2012 that have focused on the general theme of terrorism and intelligence. Each was made possible thanks to the generosity of the George T. Kalaris Fund for the Study of Intelligence.

The idea for this conference was conceived in June 2016 as a result of discussions between Professor Richard English, then the Handa Centre’s director, and myself—well in advance of both the Democrat and Republican parties’ presidential conventions and indeed long before the historic November 8, 2016 presidential election. Our intention was to bring together some of the leading scholars and practitioners to discuss current and future global and regional terrorist trends and threats; the cooperative global and regional structures needed to effectively counter these threats; and, the intelligence challenges and requirements posed by these elusive and highly-adaptive non-state adversaries.

Over the course of two days, sixteen panelists and two keynote speakers discussed with great candor and incision the variegated dimensions of these pressing issues of international security and the most appropriate responses. Among the speakers were persons with long and varied experiences of counterterrorism planning and operations involving the military, law enforcement, and intelligence; individuals with deep expertise of some of the world’s most violence-plagued regions, including the Middle East and South Asia; and, others who possessed detailed academic knowledge of radicalization processes and practical experience in countering violent extremism. They all also brought a refreshingly multidisciplinary approach to the study of terrorism, reflecting training in the social sciences and history as well as linguistics and anthropology.

1 The two previous conferences were “Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism: Operational Lessons from Policing the Conflict in Northern Ireland,” held in October 2012; and “The Future of Terrorism,” held in April 2016.
2 This fund is dedicated to honor the memory of George T. Kalaris (born May 4, 1922—died September 13, 1995), a senior career officer who served with distinction in the US Intelligence Community throughout the Cold War.
The conference thus encapsulated the ethos and commitment of both the Handa Centre and the Center for Security Studies to bridge the gap between theory and policy as well as between the academy and government. Our dedication to these ideals embodies the legacy of the late Professor Paul Wilkinson of the University of St Andrews with whom, nearly a quarter of a century ago, I cofounded the institution now known as the Handa Centre. At the intellectual foundation of that undertaking was an ineluctable belief in the resiliency of the liberal democratic state to terrorist threats—even in the face of concerted onslaught and attack. Indeed, one of Professor Wilkinson’s most important—and singularly memorable—arguments elucidating this conviction appears in his seminal work, *Terrorism And The Liberal State.*

“...constitutes what is arguably the most testing and immediate challenge to the will and courage of liberal democracies. It would, I believe, be disastrous if we failed to meet that test. Courage and a determined will to uphold liberal values and institutions, far from being irrelevant qualities more suited to the heroic past, are now more than ever needed if liberty is to survive, and contemporary barbarisms are to be vanquished.”

That statement of principle in the struggle against terrorism could easily have been written at any time during the past sixteen years. That Professor Wilkinson wrote it in 1977—at the dawn of a previous new era of violence—is a pertinent and timely reminder given the threats, challenges, and temptations that governments around the world face today.

It was indeed at the forefront of our thoughts and discussions at this conference.

I would be remiss not to take this opportunity to again thank our St Andrews colleagues—Mark Currie, Diego Muro, David Veness, Timothy Wilson, and Richard English, now of the Queen’s University, Belfast—for their help and assistance in planning this conference and for making the long journey from Fife as well as Ulster to Georgetown; our colleagues from Spain, the US east coast, and greater Washington, DC metropolitan area—Elizabeth Arsenault, Audrey Kurth Cronin, Paula Doyle, Gary Ermutlu, Christine Fair, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Hanin Ghaddar, Mary Habeck, Jytte Klausen, David Maxwell, Fernando Reinares, and, Paul Pillar, for their superb contributions; and, all the attendees—especially those coming from foreign capitals and various government agencies—along with our own security studies students, for actively contributing to the intellectual vitality of the conference and making it the

---

tremendous success that it was. Last but far from least, the conference itself would not have been possible without the brilliant organizational skills and unstinting dedication to ensuring its success of Jordan Moeny and Natalie Cronin.

Bruce Hoffman  
Director, Center for Security Studies  
Georgetown University  
Washington, DC
The Evolving Terrorist Threat and Counterterrorism Options for the Trump Administration

Bruce Hoffman

While ISIS\(^1\) poses the most serious, imminent terrorist threat today, al-Qa’ida has been quietly rebuilding and marshaling its resources to reinvigorate the war against the United States declared 20 years ago by its founder and leader, Usama bin Ladin. The result is that both groups have enmeshed the United States and the West in a debilitating war of attrition, with all its deleterious consequences. ISIS has built external operations capability that will likely survive its loss of territory in Libya, Iraq, and Syria. Meanwhile, the threat from al-Qa’ida persists and may become more serious as it attempts to capitalize on ISIS’s falling star alongside the enhancement of its own terrorist strike capabilities.

In order to better understand the background and dynamics of these developments, this presentation will discuss five key potentialities arising from these current threats:

- First, the resilience of ISIS’s external operations arm in a post-caliphate environment;
- Second, the likely enduring threat posed by the tens of thousands of foreign fighters who have answered both ISIS’s and al-Qa’ida’s respective calls to battle;
- Third, the prospect of al-Qa’ida absorbing—whether amenably or forcibly—ISIS’s surviving cadre;
- Fourth, the possibility of terrorist development and use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) re-appearing as a salient threat consideration; and,
- Fifth, what the new administration should do about it.

The Resilience of ISIS’s External Operations Arm in a Post-Caliphate Environment

ISIS, alas, is here to stay—at least for the foreseeable future. Some two years before the 2015 Paris attacks, ISIS had built an external operations network in Europe that mostly escaped notice. Known as the Amn al-Kharji or simply as “Enmi” or “Anmi” (the respective Turkish and Arabic rendering of the word, “Amniyat,” or security service), this unit appears to function independently of the group’s waning military and territorial fortunes. For instance, US intelligence and defense officials quoted by Rukmini Callimachi in her revealing August 2016

\(^1\) The Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham—also known as ISIL, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant; by its pejorative Arabic acronym, Daesh; and, simply as the Islamic State.
New York Times article believe that ISIS has already sent “hundreds of operatives” into the European Union with “hundreds more” having been dispatched to Turkey as well.\(^2\) If accurate, this investment of operational personnel ensures that ISIS will retain an effective international terrorist strike capability in Europe irrespective of its battlefield reverses in Syria and Iraq. Indeed, ISIS’s leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, has already instructed potential foreign fighters who are unable to travel to the caliphate to instead emigrate to other *wilayats* (where ISIS branches are located).\(^3\) This suggests that these other branches could develop their own external operations capabilities independent of the parent organization and present significant future threat(s)—much as al-Qa’ida’s franchises have over the past decade in Yemen, North Africa, and South Asia, among other places.

The Likely Enduring Threat Posed by the Tens of Thousands of Foreign Fighters Who Have Answered Both ISIS’s and al-Qa’ida’s Respective Calls to Battle

Moreover, in addition to the presumed sleeper cells that ISIS has seeded throughout Europe, there is the further problem of at least some of the estimated 7,000 European foreign fighters returning home.\(^4\) They are only a fraction of the nearly 40,000 persons\(^5\) from more than 100 countries throughout the world\(^6\) who have trained in Syria and Iraq. What this means is that in little more than four years ISIS’s international cadre has surpassed even the most liberal estimates of the number of foreign fighters that the US Intelligence Community believes journeyed to Afghanistan during the 1980s and 1990s in order to join al-Qa’ida.\(^7\) In other words, far more foreign nationals have been trained by ISIS in Syria and Iraq during the past couple of

---


\(^3\) Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, “This is what Allah and His Messenger had Promised Us,” *Islamic State Fuqran Media Foundation*, November 2, 2016.


years than were by al-Qa’ida in the dozen or so years leading up to the September 11th, 2001 attacks. This recreates the same constellation of organizational capabilities and trained operatives that made al-Qa’ida so dangerous sixteen years ago.

And, unlike the comparatively narrow geographical demographics of prior al-Qa’ida recruits, ISIS’s foreign fighters cadre includes hitherto unrepresented nationalities, such as hundreds of Latin Americans along with citizens from Mali, Benin, and Bangladesh, among other atypical jihadi recruiting grounds. Meanwhile, the danger from so-called lone wolf attacks also remains. The late ISIS commander Abu Muhammad al-Adnani’s famous September 2014 summons to battle has hitherto proven far more compelling than al-Qa’ida’s longstanding efforts similarly to animate, motivate, and inspire individuals to engage in violence in support of its aims.

**The Prospect of al-Qa’ida Absorbing—Whether Amenably or Forcibly—ISIS’s Surviving Cadre**

While ISIS has dominated the headlines and preoccupied the US government’s attention for the past four years, al-Qa’ida has been quietly rebuilding and marshaling its resources for the continuation of its twenty year long struggle against the United States. Indeed, its presence in Syria should be regarded as just as dangerous and even more pernicious than that of ISIS. Evidence of the high priority that the al-Qa’ida Senior Leadership (AQSL) attaches to Syria may be seen in the special messages conveyed in February and June 2012 respectively by Ayman al-Zawahiri and the late Abu Yahya al-Libi in support of the uprising against the Assad regime—calling upon Muslims in Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon to do everything within their power to assist in the overthrow of the apostate Alawites.

The fact that Jabhat al-Nusra or Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, regardless of what it calls itself, is even more capable than ISIS and a more dangerous long-term threat seems almost immaterial to many across the region who not only actively support and assist it, but actively seek to partner with what they perversely regard as a more moderate and reasonable rival to ISIS.

---


9 I am indebted to Professor Jytte Klausen of Brandeis University for her thoughts on this issue. Email correspondence, October 21, 2016. See also, Brian Dodwell, Daniel Milton, and Don Rassler, *The Caliphate’s Global Workforce: An Inside Look At the Islamic State’s Foreign Fighter Paper Trail* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, April 2016), p. 9.
This development may be seen as fitting neatly into al-Zawahiri’s broader strategy of letting ISIS take all the heat and absorb all the blows from the coalition arrayed against it while al-Qa’ida quietly rebuilds its military strength and basks in its paradoxical new cachet as “moderate extremists” in contrast to the unconstrained ISIS.

Anyone inclined to be taken in by this ruse would do well to heed the admonition of Theo Padnos (Peter Theo Curtis), the American journalist who spent two years in Syria as a hostage of Jabhat al-Nusra. Padnos relates how, “The Nusra Front higher-ups were inviting Westerners to the jihad in Syria not so much because they needed more foot soldiers—they didn’t—but because they want to teach the Westerners to take the struggle into every neighborhood and subway back home.”

Finally, the importance of Syria to al-Qa’ida’s plans may be seen in the number of AQSL personages who have relocated there. Mushin al-Fadhli, a bin Ladin intimate who, until his death from a US airstrike in 2015, had commanded the Khorasan Group—al-Qa’ida’s elite, forward-based operational arm in Syria. Haydar Kirkan, a Turkish national and longstanding, senior al-Qa’ida commander, had been sent back to his homeland in 2010—presumably by bin Ladin himself. Kirkan’s orders were to build an infrastructure in the region to facilitate the movement of key al-Qa’ida personnel hiding in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas in order to escape the escalation of drone strikes ordered by President Obama. Kirkan was recently killed as a result of a US bombing raid in Idlib, Syria.

And, in late 2015, al-Zawahiri dispatched Saif al-Adl, al-Qa’ida’s most experienced and battle-hardened senior commander, to Syria in order to oversee the group’s interests there. With this senior command structure in place, al-Qa’ida is thus well positioned to exploit ISIS’s weakening military position and territorial losses and once again regain its pre-eminent position at the vanguard of the Salafi-jihadi movement. ISIS in any event can no longer compete with al-Qa’ida in terms of influence, reach, manpower, and cohesion. In only one domain is ISIS currently stronger than its rival: the ability to mount spectacular terrorist strikes in Europe—and this is only because al-Qa’ida has decided for the time being to restrain this type of operation.

Looking to the immediate future, ISIS’s continuing setbacks and serial weakening arguably create the conditions where some reconciliation with al-Qa’ida might yet be effected. Efforts to reunite have in fact been continuous from both sides virtually from the time of ISIS’s expulsion from the al-Qa’ida fold in 2014. Regardless of how it might occur, any kind of reconciliation between ISIS an al-Qa’ida or re-amalgamation or cooperation between the two

---

groups would profoundly change the current conflict and result in a significantly escalated threat of foreign fighter terrorist operations in the West.

The Possibility of Terrorist Development and Use of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Re-appearing as a Salient Threat Consideration

A quarter of a century ago, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher described publicity as the oxygen upon which terrorism depended. Today, however, it is access to sanctuary and safe haven that sustains and nourishes terrorism. A depressing pattern has established itself whereby we continue to kill terrorist leaders while the organizations they lead nonetheless continue to seize more territory. Indeed, according to the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), a year before the United States launched the current campaign to defeat ISIS, the group had a presence in only seven countries around the world. By 2015, the same year that the Obama Administration’s latest counterterrorism strategy had been enunciated, that number had nearly doubled. And, as recently as this past August, the NCTC reported that ISIS was “fully operational” in eighteen countries.\(^\text{11}\) Meanwhile, al-Qa’ida is also present in more countries today (nearly two dozen by my count) than it was in 2001—and in three times as many as when the Obama Administration took office in 2009. Today, foreign volunteers are fighting in Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Libya, and Mali as well as in Syria and Iraq, among other places.

Sanctuary also permits more scope for terrorist research and development efforts to produce various weapons of destruction (WMD—more accurately CBRN weapons: chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons). In the case of al-Qa’ida’s presence in Afghanistan before the September 11th, 2001 attacks, these fears were more than amply justified. The group’s interest in acquiring a nuclear weapon had reportedly commenced as far back as 1992—a mere four years after its creation. Indeed, bin Ladin’s continued interest in nuclear weaponry was also on display at the time of the September 11th, 2001 attacks. Two Pakistani nuclear scientists, identified as Sultan Bashiruddin Mahmood and Abdul Majeed, spent three days that August at a secret al-Qa’ida facility outside Kabul. Although their discussions with bin Ladin, al-Zawahiri, and other senior al-Qa’ida commanders also focused on the development and employment of chemical and biological weapons, Mahmood—the former director for nuclear power at Pakistan’s Atomic Energy Commission—claimed that bin Ladin’s foremost interest was in developing a nuclear weapon. Nor is there any reason to suspect that al-Qa’ida’s general

---

fascination with either nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction or mass disruption has ever completely abated or disappeared.

Al-Qaeda’s research and development of biological warfare agents, for instance, were not only actively pursued but were also far more advanced than its nuclear ambitions. They appear to have begun in earnest with a memo written by al-Zawahiri on April 15th, 1999 to Muhammad Ataf, then-deputy commander of al-Qaeda’s military committee. Citing articles from leading scholarly publications such as Science, the Journal of Immunology, and the New England Journal of Medicine, as well as information gleaned from authoritative books such as Tomorrow’s Weapons (1964), Peace or Pestilence (1949), and Chemical Warfare (1924), al-Zawahiri outlined in detail his thoughts on the priority that needed to be given to developing a biological weapons capability. At least two separate teams of al-Qaeda operatives were subsequently tasked to undertake parallel research and development efforts to produce anthrax, ricin, and chemical warfare agents at the movement’s facilities in Kandahar and Derunta. Bio-warfare experts believe that on the eve of the September 11th, 2001 attacks, al-Qaeda was at least two to three years away from producing a sufficient quantity of anthrax to use as a weapon.

More recently, credible intelligence surfaced in 2010 that al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)—widely considered the movement’s most dangerous and capable affiliate—was deeply involved in the development of ricin, a bio-weapon made from castor beans that the FBI has termed the third most toxic substance known to mankind—behind only plutonium and botulism. Then, in May 2013, Turkish authorities seized two kilos of sarin nerve gas—the same weapon used in the 1995 attack on the Tokyo subway system—and arrested twelve men linked to al-Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate. Days later, another set of sarin-related arrests was made in Iraq of terrorist belonging to ISIS’s immediate predecessor, who were reportedly respectively overseeing the production of sarin and mustard blistering agents in at least two different locations. ISIS, of course, has also repeatedly employed chemical weapons, including against civilians, in Syria. It is doubtful whether they would feel constrained from deploying these weapons elsewhere.

What the New Administration Should Do About it All

In sum, the Trump Administration is facing perhaps the most parlous international security environment since the period immediately following the September 11th, 2001 attacks—with serious threats now emanating from not one but two terrorist movements and a previous counterterrorism strategy and approach that has failed. Indeed, the three pillars upon which that
strategy was based—leadership attrition, training of local forces, and countering violent extremism—have thus failed to deliver a crushing blow to ISIS and al-Qa’ida.12

The US-led war on terrorism has now lasted longer than our participation in both world wars. It has surpassed even our active military involvement in Vietnam during the 1960s and 1970s. Like the Viet Cong guerrillas and People’s Army of Vietnam main force units, our Salafi-jihadi enemies have locked us into an enervating war of attrition—the preferred strategy of terrorists and guerrillas from time immemorial. They hope to undermine national political will, corrode internal popular support, and demoralize us and our regional partners through a prolonged, generally intensifying and increasingly diffuse campaign of terrorism and violence. In his last publicly released, videotaped statement, bin Ladin revealed precisely this strategy on the eve of the 2004 presidential election. “So we are continuing this policy in bleeding America to the point of bankruptcy,” he declared.

“Allah willing, and nothing is too great for Allah...This is in addition to our having experience in using guerrilla warfare and the war of attrition to fight tyrannical superpowers, as we, alongside the mujahidin, bled Russia for 10 years, until it went bankrupt and was forced to withdraw in defeat.”13

Decisively breaking this stasis and emerging from this war of attrition must therefore be among the Trump Administration’s highest priorities. Simply killing a small number of leaders in terrorist groups, whose ranks in any event are continually replenished, will not end the threats posed by ISIS and al-Qa’ida nor dislodge them from their bases of operation in the Levant and Iraq, North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and South Asia. The slow and fractured process of training indigenous government security forces in those regions will not do so either. The inadequacy of these training activities and efforts to build partner capacity are evidenced by the mostly unimpeded escalation of terrorist activities in all those places. Whether in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Somalia, and especially in Yemen, our efforts to build partner capacity have all foundered. In each, Islamist terrorist numbers grew faster than we were able to train indigenous

12 The most recent official elucidation of this approach is the 2015 National Security Strategy document. It explains how the United States, “shifted away from a model of fighting costly, large-scale ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in which the United States—particularly our military—bore an enormous burden. Instead, we are now pursuing a more sustainable approach that prioritizes targeted counterterrorism operations, collective action with responsible partners, and increased efforts to prevent the growth of violent extremism and radicalization that drives increased threats.” See National Security Strategy, February 2015, p. 9, https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf

security forces effectively; terrorist control over territory and the creation of new sanctuaries and safe havens expanded while governmental sovereignty contracted; and, the terrorists’ operational effectiveness appreciably outpaced that of their government opponents. While there has been some recent progress in Mali, Nigeria, Syria, and Iraq, it is not clear whether the past problems that undermined the performance of indigenous militaries have been adequately addressed and reversed. Accordingly, the Trump Administration should conduct a complete reevaluation and systemic overhaul of our training and resourcing of foreign partners if we are to prevent the further spread of ISIS and al-Qa’ida branches and counter their entrenchment across the multiple regions in which they have already embedded themselves.

While continued and increased US combat air support is also required—especially in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and in support of French forces in Mali—that alone is not the answer. American and allied air strikes in coordination with local ground forces have not brought any of these counterterrorist campaigns to rapid conclusion. Therefore, in tandem with both the continued use of air power and deployment of supporting American special operations forces personnel, division-size conventional US military forces might be usefully deployed on a strict 90-day rotation into violence-plagued rural areas and urban trouble spots. They have the necessary combat experience and skill-sets to sequentially eliminate terrorist strength in each of these areas and thereby enable indigenous security forces to follow in their wake to stabilize and police newly liberated places. By providing more effective governance and core services—with sustained US and European support—host nations could thus better prevent the recurrence of terrorism and return of terrorist forces.

Conclusion

The current threat environment posed by the emergence and spread of ISIS and the stubborn resilience and long-game approach of al-Qa’ida makes a new strategy and new organizational and institutional behaviors necessary. The non-traditional challenges to US national security and foreign policy imperatives posed by elusive and deadly irregular adversaries emphasizes the need to anchor changes that will more effectively close the gap between detecting irregular adversarial activity and rapidly defeating it. The effectiveness of this strategy will be based on our capacity to think like a networked enemy, in anticipation of how they may act in a variety of situations, aided by different resources. This goal requires that the US national security structure organize itself for maximum efficiency, information sharing, and the ability to function quickly and effectively under new operational definitions.
About the Author

Bruce Hoffman has been studying terrorism and insurgency for over four decades. He is a tenured professor in Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service where he directs security studies. Hoffman is also visiting Professor of Terrorism Studies at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. He previously held the Corporate Chair in Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency at the RAND Corporation. Hoffman was appointed by the United States Congress as a commissioner on the 9/11 Review Commission and has been Scholar-in-Residence for Counterterrorism at the Central Intelligence Agency; adviser on counterterrorism, Coalition Provisional Authority, Baghdad, Iraq; and, adviser on counterinsurgency, Multi-National Forces-Iraq Headquarters, Baghdad, Iraq. Hoffman’s books include The Evolution of the Global Terrorist Threat (2014); Anonymous Soldiers (2015); and, Inside Terrorism (2017).
In trying to figure out what to do about ISIS, the international community seems to have forgotten the other side of the coin, that is, Iran’s Shia militias in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and other places in the region. Countering terrorism requires a broader look at terrorist groups, and understanding that they feed on each other’s sectarian rhetoric.

ISIS uses an anti-Shia sectarian rhetoric to recruit fighters, and Iran does the same with an increasingly anti-Sunni—or anti-Takfiri—rhetoric. To defeat ISIS, one must not ignore Iran’s armed militias and their atrocities in the region, and vice versa. However, this does not mean that the solution is to bomb Iran’s militias in Syria and Iraq, or continue bombing ISIS away. With the Russian involvement in Syria, the integration of Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) in Iraq’s army, and Hizballah’s control of Lebanon’s state institutions, a military solution is not that simple.

Two main events placed the region at a crossroads in the last three years: the declaration of the “caliphate” or the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), known commonly as the Iran deal or Iran nuclear deal, which is an international agreement on the nuclear program of Iran reached in Vienna on July 14th, 2015 between Iran and the P5+1. But while the world was focusing on these two happenings and their consequences in the region, Europe, and the United States, Iran has been working steadily to realize its main goal, which is boosting its regional hegemony and linking Tehran via Iraq and Syria to the South of Lebanon, both by fulfilling a geographical bridge that spans across the three countries, and seizing the political decision in the three capitals: Baghdad, Damascus, and Beirut.

Implementing Hizballah’s Sacred Narrative

Iran’s plan began in Lebanon in 1979, as soon as the Islamic State of Iran was established in Tehran. Its efforts to bring the Lebanese Shia support resulted in establishing Hizballah in 1982 as an Islamic resistance against Israel. Although the concept of resistance was a very successful tool to attract support, it wouldn’t have been successful without a strategy that constructed a new Shia identity. Hizballah has thus based its strategy on three pillars.

First, Hizballah established an independent economy and social services for the Shia community in Lebanon, making Shia dependent on Hizballah and independent from state
institutions. Hizballah became the Shia’s protector and provider, and this was easy to accomplish because the state’s institutions had been weakened by the Lebanese Civil War.

Second, Hizballah linked its ideology of resistance to the Shia’s collective memory of the battle of Karbala in 680 CE, when an army sent by the Sunni Caliph Yazid I defeated Imam Hussein ibn Ali, grandson of the prophet Muhammad. This battle is the root of the historical schism between Sunni and Shia Islam, allowing Hizballah to portray the strongest component of Shia identity as part of Hizballah’s resistance narrative. In effect, Ali and his family are equated with Hizballah and their enemies with Israel.

Third, Hizballah linked all of this to Iran’s ideology of wilayat al-faqih, according to which Islamic judges have the right to rule over their people. This turns Iran, as the only country that is culturally, religiously, and economically ruled by Islamic jurists, into the main provider and protector of Shi‘ism and its believers. This was done through meticulous and nuanced absorption of Lebanon’s Shia cultural, religious, and social occasions and events into a broader narrative of resistance and Iran’s definition of Shi‘ism. Every occasion transformed into a space for politicization and lobbying public support.

All of this led to the extreme politicization of the Shia community, where politics and history combined to form a “sacred narrative.” During the 2006 war with Israel, this narrative was used to declare a divine victory. And everything Hizballah had done or said was conceived by the Shia in Lebanon as sacred and could not be argued with.

But when Hizballah was dragged into the war in Syria, things started to change, and the sacred narrative started to crumble. Public discontent was quelled for a time by comparing the battles in Syria to Karbala. Besides claiming to defend Shia towns and shrines, Hizballah started marketing its involvement as necessary to defend the Shia identity, exactly as Hussein ibn Ali did in the seventh century. Hizballah also claimed that the war in Syria was a sacred battle that would pave the way for the appearance of the awaited Mahdi, the “twelfth Imam” who serves as a messianic figure for Shia Muslims. But as casualties mounted in Syria, the majority of Shia in Lebanon began to realize that the sacred narrative is not always a recipe for victory.

**How Syria Transformed Hizballah**

Syria has changed Hizballah’s priorities, strategies, and narrative. Its budget became mostly devoted to military operations, and although funding for social services continued, more of it was directed to families and institutions linked to Hizballah’s military infrastructure. Also, “resistance” against Israel became secondary as the group shifted its focus to the Syrian conflict. Today, Hizballah is openly hesitant to start a war with Israel. But most significantly, Hizballah
has failed to deliver its “divine victory.” Once considered a force that won quick, decisive victories, Hizballah is now a force that ships home the bodies of “martyrs” killed while fighting a foreign war.

As Hizballah becomes more deeply entrenched in Syria, the resistance that once attracted eager volunteers has transformed into a corporate institution for fighters looking for an income or status. Far from answering a calling, new recruits are now signing on for a job in the Syria war, encouraged by the monthly salary of $500-1,200 with benefits.

Many Shia in Lebanon today see Hizballah as both a sectarian protector and an employer. The sectarian rhetoric that aggravated the Sunni-Shia rift in the region has isolated the Shia community from its Lebanese and Arab depth, depriving them of job opportunities in Lebanon and the Gulf countries. Fighting in Syria has become almost the only source of income for Shia Muslims coming from poor families and neighborhoods. The war no longer has any meaning, only a necessity.

This has led to serious turnover within Hizballah’s ranks. Trained fighters who joined Hizballah prior to the Syria war are leaving the moment they can find another source of income, while there is a wave of newcomers, who are less trained, not as loyal, less religious, but more sectarian.

**Iran’s Big Picture**

Regardless, Iran—with new Shia recruits from Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan—has almost completed its regional plan. Today, Hizballah, the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs), and other Pakistani and Afghani Shia militias—referred to as The *Fatimiyun*—constitute one force under the control of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). This pan-Shia army is founded, funded, and trained by the IRGC in order to consolidate Iranian control over the region. In Syria, this Shia army’s main mission is to protect the “useful Syria”—which is a geographic corridor stretching from the Alawite coast, through Homs, the suburbs of Damascus, all the way to al-Qalamun at the borders of Lebanon. It also goes through Homs to the borders of Iraq through Aleppo and Deir al-Zour, thereby linking Syria to Iraq through Tal Afar, where the PMU are very active today.

Despite the Russian intervention in Syria and its boosted control over Syria’s state institutions, Iran’s “Useful Syria” is still intact. Russian President Vladimir Putin does not mind an Iranian corridor in Syria as long as Tehran does not try to overpower Russia in Damascus. And Iran knows that it needs Moscow, given that the incoming Trump Administration has signaled a tougher US stance on the nuclear deal and other Iranian interests. So, if Russia wants
to call the shots on the international front while Iran secures its position in Syria, Tehran will not make too much noise.

But for Iran, this corridor will not be secure unless it is Sunni-free, and secured by Shia militias, mainly Hizballah, and that is due to the lack of trust between the IRGC and the Syrian Army. Therefore, while Assad was protecting Damascus by signing deals with rebels in surrounding towns after besieging them for years, Iran was taking advantage of these deals to evacuate Sunnis to northern Syria.

Hizballah has already conducted ethnic cleansing of its own in certain areas along the border (e.g., its 2013 campaigns in al-Qusayr and the al-Qalamun region). Also, hundreds of thousands of Sunnis were evacuated from Homs between 2011 and 2014, when a deal was finally struck with regime forces after starvation reached horrifying levels. According to pan-Arab press, Iraqi families, “particularly from the Shia-[populated] southern provinces,” were moved to Syria to repopulate the recently evacuated Damascus suburbs. Harakat Hizballah al-Nujaba, an Iraqi Shia paramilitary force close to Iran, has reportedly overseen the resettlement of 300 such families, who were granted homes and $2,000 each.

This Syrian corridor is important for Iran because it will be the bridge that links Tehran to the south of Lebanon. Physically, it will be a cheaper and easier way to transport weapons, equipment, and fighters, but it is also a platform of power that gives Iran a stronger presence and a say in political and military decisions.

Iran has invested too many resources, money, fighters, and energy in Syria to just abandon its interests if an international agreement was made. Iran is there to stay, and Hizballah will not return to Lebanon any time soon.

Looking Forward

Despite Iran’s determination to take and secure this corridor, there will be challenges that the international community could take advantage of.

This corridor will be surrounded by a sea of angry Sunnis who—without a political solution approved by all regional and international players—will not surrender to Iran’s hegemony. Iran still prefers a military solution, at least until it completes its control over the “Useful Syria” and links it to both Iraq’s and Lebanon’s borders. Although it is not simple to disrupt this corridor, it is not too late to try, at least in areas that are not finalized. A strategic long-term political solution can put an end to Iran’s military proceedings, and force the IRGC to halt its plan to complete this corridor. However, a solution only brokered by Russia—such as the
Astana agreement—cannot work. Any solution needs to involve all regional players and the United States cannot be a mere observer.

More sanctions targeting entities involved in Iran’s regional operations could be another way to increase pressure on Shia militias fighting under the IRGC. But this could be a more successful tool if it was accompanied by providing economic alternatives for the Shia community.

For example, many Shia fighters and non-fighters I have interviewed said that they wouldn’t consider the war in Syria if they had access to jobs or loans to start small businesses. The problem is that they are too financially dependent on Hizballah and have no other options. Before the war in Syria, this financial dependence was not problematic, due to the resistance rhetoric accompanied by social services. It all made sense. Today, because of the militarization of the Shia community in Lebanon, many want a way out. Therefore, a demilitarization of this community requires serious and long-term efforts to financially detach it from Hizballah and Iran.

The good news is that many in this community want this now.

About the Author

Hanin Ghaddar is the inaugural Friedmann Visiting Fellow at The Washington Institute. The longtime managing editor of Lebanon’s NOW news website, her research is focused on Shi’ite politics throughout the Levant. Ghaddar has shed light on a broad range of cutting-edge issues, from the evolution of Hezbollah inside Lebanon’s fractured political system to Iran’s growing influence throughout the Middle East. In addition, she has contributed to a number of US-based magazines and newspapers, including The New York Times, The Washington Post, and Foreign Policy. Prior to joining NOW in 2007, Ghaddar wrote for Lebanese newspapers As-Safir, An-Nahar, and Al-Hayat, and also worked as a researcher for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) regional office. Ghaddar holds a bachelor’s degree in English Literature and a master’s degree in Middle Eastern Studies, both from the American University in Beirut.
Global Trends in Terrorism

Sir David Veness

My submission in this paper is that the key global trend in terrorism and counterterrorism is that there is a gap between a significant group of threats and the collective response. This group of terrorist threats has grown in scale including numbers, geographic span, innovative methodology, and exploitation of electronic technology. This growth and development is tantamount to the reinvention of terrorism. Central to this growth and development has been the period in which this group of threats has operated and latterly occupied territory in Syria and Iraq. Therefore, the new US administration is thus entirely correct to identify this group of threats as a priority focus.

The opportunity is to further enhance understanding of the current group of threats and to assess what is next in their timeline. There is also the opportunity—indeed the necessity—to define the aims and scope of a collective and comprehensive continuing revision of counterterrorist strategy. To expand the gap thesis, it may be helpful to pose the question: what grounds are there to justify the claim that terrorism has, at least in part, been reinvented?

The most compelling evidence is the global context of contemporary conflict and the role that terrorism plays to make these conflicts more harmful. Terrorism is being used by the Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda (AQ) in Syria and Iraq as a component of military operations. It is a strategic and tactical asset in overlapping civil war and insurgency made more dire and complex by the use of Syria and Iraq as arenas to pursue regional tensions and struggles.

The result is massive harm:

- Death and injury on an enormous scale;
- Human refugee crises;
- Internal population displacement;
- Community breakdown; and
- Phenomenal property damage

The harm caused by terrorism in Syria and Iraq “spills over” to the directly neighboring states. For Iraq, the direct neighbors are Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, and Turkey (6 countries); for Syria, the direct neighbors are Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan (5 countries). In total, nine direct neighbors cross-border. Terrorist attacks connected to Syria and Iraq have been commonplace—notably in Turkey, but also regularly in Lebanon and Jordan.
Spillover has also involved an unprecedented refugee influx to neighboring countries with the further generation of population flows onwards to Western Europe. Spillover also contributes to internal instability in directly neighboring countries—again Turkey is a compelling example where IS seeks to directly contribute to violence between Turks and Kurds and Islamists and secular Turks. Although Syria, Iraq, and the directly neighboring states are among the clearest examples of the negative impacts of terrorism, they are not alone. But they are an essential element of a new counterterrorism strategy.

Patrick Cockburn writing in *The Age of Jihad* points to eight wars being fought in Muslim countries in Asia/Africa: Syria and Iraq are two. The other six are the armed conflict between Turkey and Kurds and civil wars in Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, and northeast Nigeria. Terrorism by extremist jihadist groups plays a role in each of these conflicts. The threat of terrorism is also an important element of discord in Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Mali, and Kenya in Africa and Pakistan in Asia. The geographic breadth of conflict of which terrorism is a key factor reinforces the analysis that the threat of terrorism has been “reinvented”.

But there is another important evidential aspect to this conclusion. Here we take a different perspective and narrow the lens to view the current threat through the eyes of those presently responsible for protecting Western cities. In my view, they are confronting multiple layers of threat that are unprecedented and represent a major step change from previous terrorist methodology.

What do I mean by layers of threat and why are they important? To begin with, they are indicators of the complexity of the task confronting those charged with public security. Next, they are indicators of threat development and the need for dynamic evolution of counterterrorism. In recent years, a Western city may have typically confronted three attack layers, for example:

- Expeditionary attacks by cross-border terrorists;
- Domestic groups pursuing violent agendas; and
- Attacks upon foreign interests by overseas groups, such as an Embassy attack.

My analysis is that current counterterrorism policymakers and practitioners in Western cities are facing seven layers of threat. The growth from three to seven layers of threat has taken place mainly because of factors external to the cities themselves. This underlines the importance of closer coordination of effort to counterterrorism between CT activities at home and CT endeavors overseas.

What are the seven layers I am highlighting?
Firstly, “core” group attacks. These are important because core group attacks include the risk of spectacular and highly impactful events.

Next are external operations and support structures. The most compelling examples are in Western Europe and Turkey, where IS has clearly positioned resources to mount attacks either by the external teams themselves or in partnership with core group attackers or local extremists. External operations are a major development. They have the potential to be adopted by affiliate groupings as well as core entities—thus proliferating these structures.

Third are the overseas actions of affiliate groups of both IS and AQ on the model that AQAP has pursued previously.

Fourth are local groups in Western nations where the local groups have a lesser degree of linkage than core plots and external operations, but, nevertheless, are pursuing a related extremist agenda.

Fifth is the category that has seen considerable growth and which has the largest scope for future expansion. These are attacks conducted by individuals or small groups who have been inspired or provoked to attack Western targets using whatever means are at hand. Terrorist propaganda commonly by electronic means is the method to radicalize, maybe in a short time period, and further exploit developments in electronic communication, especially of images, acting as a multiplier to optimize coverage and impact. These attacks are simple, they reach out to a very wide range of potential attackers, and they focus on unprotected targets. Regrettably, hostile vehicles in crowded places are becoming a hallmark of this attack category. It is a mistake to dismiss this layer of attack as low impact as the July attack in Nice last year brutally demonstrated.

The sixth stratum is the menace of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (the FTF threat). It is salutary that the FTF threat, which is a significant indicator of changed circumstances, is only one of seven contemporary layers. The FTF threat is enhanced by sheer numbers and its connection to other layers, including core groups, external operations structures, and local groups.

For completeness, there is the insider threat, such as the Turkish policeman who murdered the Russian Ambassador on December 19th, 2016 in Ankara. Insider threats are also of special concern to aviation and transport security.

The seven layers are further complicated by the scale of numbers, innovation, manipulation of mental illness, the exploitation of smuggling routes, and the mass movement of people in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

These complications are crosscutting factors in addition to these seven layers:
• Core groups;
• External structures;
• Affiliates;
• Local groups;
• Inspired/provoked incidents;
• FTF; and
• Insiders.

These seven layers will predictably overlap and interact in both preparation and attack phases. This has been a feature of recent attacks. However, the key lesson for counterterrorism practitioners is that each layer has the capability to prepare and deliver attacks acting in its own right as an independent threat. What then does the new US administration need to know about terrorism and counterterrorism?

Firstly, the terrorist threat is very severe and likely to be substantial and persistent; it applies to both the homeland and overseas national interests; and its recent trajectory has been worsening. The global context of conflict in Asia and Africa and notably Syria and Iraq is important. The caliphate has a timeline and will continue to change, but the concept will not disappear. Presently, the quasi-state with resource access, territory, operational reach and functioning as a laboratory for terrorist innovation, and a magnet for FTFs is diminishing. But, alternative lawless space exists in Syria and Iraq and in affiliate territories and there is also the question of a symbolic or virtual caliphate—a caliphate by other means.

The multi-dimensional threat to Western cities is especially challenging. Innovation is part of the threat and will continue to add new menaces. Further development of inspired and provoked attacks is highly likely, especially as IS pursues revenge as its territory shrinks; this development will be assisted by advances in electronic technology. The terrorist threat has arguably been reinvented and the new multi-layered reality presented by IS and AQ is the starting point for enhanced response.

As regards counterterrorism, there are abiding elements of wisdom which remain relevant:

• Don’t make matters worse;
• Don’t make avoidable errors;
• Define achievable and positive aims; and
• Operate within the rule of law.
Beyond these basics, counterterrorism needs to be rethought, improved, and enhanced because present coalition and other strategies are not reducing the threat. Elimination of the threat is unrealistic and not a sensible aim. Progress towards reduced instability in Syria and Iraq is a very important component of a rethought strategy. This progress should involve all the neighboring nations and relevant regional powers plus existing coalition partners. The inclusive multinational effort should involve political and diplomatic as well as military components. The intervention of very large-scale Western military forces on a war footing will be counterproductive and will meet predictable domestic opposition within the multinational effort.

The preference for operations by, with, and through local actors remains the best option, but there is clearly scope for considerable improvement in training of local forces and for expansion of the range of specialist and expert reinforcement of local actors. Local forces are the only long-term solution. Demonization of the religion of Islam is to be avoided. It risks conflation of violent and nonviolent entities. The perceived Syrian ground truth is that the West has failed to protect Muslims at a time of dire suffering. Thus, demonization only reinforces negative consequences and supports extremism. Any greater involvement of Western militaries may achieve benefits, but will also add to the threat to Western interests at home and abroad. Revenge attacks are inevitable.

Thus, measures to protect US interests overseas need to be reinforced by an agenda of actions including increasingly robust travel advice, support to the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), realistic appraisal of local security capacity, and review of the actuality of local deployment to protect Western interests, tourists, and aviation among others.

The multinational effort will not be successful unless it is sustained and multifaceted. These elements need to be fundamental to the design of a revised strategy. Deficiencies in counterterrorism need to be addressed in developed as well as developing countries. Contribution to cross-border efforts remains incomplete, for example inadequate support for Europol and Interpol databases. International cooperation needs more proactivity.

To summarize, the creation of an effective revised counterterrorism strategy on an inclusive multinational foundation is a major challenge that must draw upon the widest range of talents and experience. It is an enormously sophisticated and complex undertaking. But, there is immense expertise on this topic in the world’s leading intelligence and security agencies. There is a fund of good work already underway in various coalitions, the GCTF, and the UN strategy.

Finally, what does success look like for a revised counterterrorism strategy? There are four achievable aims:
• The adverse impact IS/AQ is limited, especially in Syria and Iraq and affiliate provinces;
• Syria is in transition to less instability;
• Iraq is more stable; and
• There is enhanced counterterrorism in target countries to address both national targets and overseas targets within the target countries.

About the Author

Sir David Veness is an Honorary Professor of International Relations at the Handa Centre For the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews. David served as Under-Secretary General for the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) from its creation in 2005, following a terrorist tragedy in Iraq, until June 2009. This role carries responsibility for the protection of UN staff and operations globally. Prior to this appointment, he was Assistant Commissioner Specialist Operations at New Scotland Yard from 1994-2005. David has a continuing commitment to public/private co-operation in the interests of public security and chairs the Advisory Board of the London First Security & Resilience Network. He was awarded the Queen’s Police Medal in 1994, appointed a Commander of the British Empire in 2000, and Knighted in 2004.
Back to the Future: The Historian and the Threat Horizon

Tim Wilson

Introduction

I hope that you will bear with me if I open with some general reflections on what the historian might have to offer a gathering like this one which is so resolutely, and appropriately, forward-facing. I am well aware that I am not entirely alone here. Bruce Hoffman, Richard English (and doubtless others here, too) have written with great distinction on the deep past of terrorism. If I may be forgiven an *Apocalypse Now* reference they, too, know the smell of archive dust in the morning.

But still it remains true, I think, that if much of the ‘horizon scanning’ in terrorism studies is resolutely focused on the one ahead. Horizons that lie behind us are the ones most rarely, or lightly, scanned. I wish tentatively to suggest that the occasional over-the-shoulder glance may have its own heuristic value.

And it is here that the disarming simplicity of this panel’s title—*What Next?*—leaves me a little vulnerable. Historians tend often to be a little allergic to any serious consideration of the question of what is going to come next. Their stock answer to this enquiry tends to be a rather glib: ‘the future? That’s not my period’.

And yet the historian can hardly get away so easily from the future, if only because—very obviously and banally—there is no clear dividing line between past, present, and future. What I am about to say belongs to the future. [Pause]. And now it is in the past, albeit the very recent past. Somewhere in between is a flickering cursor-point that we call the present, but it is hard to pin it down.

The deeper implication here, of course, is that any sensible attempt at prediction is likely to be rooted in some consideration—however sketchy, or intuitive—of the likely forward momentum of past tendencies.

So, when just about 12 months ago in early 2016, Craig Hamilton-Parker—whom I have it on good authority is Britain’s best loved popular psychic—predicted *both* the result of Brexit referendum and Trump’s win in the US presidential election, I was perhaps less impressed than I should have been. The skeptic in me takes it that, along with a healthy dose of gambler’s luck, his predictions were most probably rooted in at least some consideration of past and present political realities. Whichever way he jumped on Brexit, he always had a 50% chance of calling it
right. And the rise of nativism and populism generally has been the Big Story of late in Western democracies.

Just as an aside, you may (or may not) be interested to know that his terrorism-related predictions for 2017 include:

- A toxic OR biological attack on a school in Europe
- A kidnap attempt on the Pope at the Vatican (intriguingly specific, you might think)

And in a spirit of full disclosure, we might also note that Craig Hamilton Parker also included in his prognosis for 2016 a couple of ‘turkeys’ such as:

- A coup in China
- A major earthquake in the Himalayas

Still, let us be kind. Let us not call them ‘turkeys’. With all due homage to recent shifts in semantic fashion let’s call them ‘alternative predictions’. Nonetheless, the foundational point remains. Hamilton Parker’s record of calling the future right is a rather mixed one.

It is easy to mock. That is the fun part. The harder question, though, is to ask: can professional historians do qualitatively better? Can they offer, if not more certainty, a better or more thought-provoking grade of ignorance? Are they really any better at futurology than the psychics?

And here, I must confess, I stand before you in a spirit of some humility since, like so many others in the commentariat, I, too, had fully expected to be addressing the challenges faced in her first week of office by Madame President Clinton. I was wrong. But I should not have been so surprised. If nothing else, professional historians should know better than most that history is a pitching machine that mostly delivers curve balls.

The Trump Administration: Future Challenges

So in that spirit of humility, I have attempted to take Bruce’s admirably clear conference title—’what does the incoming US administration need to know about terrorism/counter-terrorism?’—and treat it as a sort of exam question. More particularly, I have tried to focus on ‘what does this incoming US administration need to know about terrorism?’ Or rather, ‘terrorisms’, in its plural form.

And here it seemed that one could do worse than start with international groups or movements that don’t seem to like Donald Trump very much and try to explore, in the light of
long-term historical experience, how great a ‘terroristic’ headache they might pose to his Administration. Without trekking too far into the barren wastes of arid definitionalism that stretch all around the question of ‘what is terrorism?’ I am thinking here largely of the usual bag of tricks: bombs, shootings, hijackings, and destruction of property, *et cetera*. And I’ll attempt to work through an escalating typology from less threatening to more threatening.

**Feminist Terrorism**

I was intrigued here by Newt Gringich’s recent ruminations that he described an ‘emerging left-wing fascism’. And I was even more intrigued by Madonna’s startling confession that she had been thinking ‘an awful lot’ about blowing up the White House—a statement that suggests that she has not moved on very far from her 2015 *Borrowed Time* album. Then she pondered (with notable indecision) the question, ‘Do we need to build a bomb?’ She still seems stuck at that point.

Given the hostility that Trump has inspired amongst feminists (both male and female), is there any chance of this wave of protest assuming violent form? And if so, what form? What, in short, do we know about the phenomenon of feminist terrorism historically?

A couple of points are worth making here:

- To rip off a Richard English point, the relative absence of a specifically feminist terrorism is powerful evidence of the lack of a clear causational link between objective evidence of oppression, and political violence designed to oppose it. By any detached assessment across much of human history, women have clearly had a far lousier social deal than men; and yet, it has led to relatively little feminist violence.

- The perhaps most obvious restraining force here is that while class or ethnic relations may in many contexts become sharply polarized, men and women still tend to have intimate relations—and however unsatisfactory in quality these may or may not be, they seem to act as a sharp break towards consistent violent escalation.

But, that is not to say there is no potential for the emergence of violence spearheaded largely, or overwhelmingly, by women in the service of feminist goals, broadly defined. Two examples spring readily to mind:

- The British Suffragette Movement that in 1913-1914 caused over a £1 million of property damage largely through arson and bombing (including the marine
laboratory of the University of St Andrews). This campaign probably took 2 lives in a fire at a naval dockyard and came close to taking the life of the Prime Minister. So it was exciting enough while it lasted.

- The Rota Zora movement in 1980s West Germany, a breakaway splinter group of the Revolutionary Cells movement, kidnapped and humiliated pornographers as well as firebombing clothing shops that they alleged depended on supply chains stretching back to exploited female workers in Bangladesh.

So, in both of these cases, a militant feminist movement that turned to violence did not go much beyond property damage. My best guess, in summary, is that there is some danger of a violent feminist backlash to Trump, but it is probably containable. At least internationally, feminist animus is focused very tightly on the person and persona of Donald Trump himself: how far this might feed into the highly complex US politics of abortion and reproductive rights, I am not qualified to speculate. But this is probably not going to be the administration’s premier terrorism headache.

**Ecoterrorism**

Al Gore has predicted that the early months of a Trump Presidency will be greeted with a massive upsurge of environmental activism. Rightly or wrongly, the perception among liberal opinion in the rest of the Western World is that one quarter of the US electorate has delivered a plutocratic administration dedicated to an enthusiastic looting of the planet’s resources; and a general mortgaging of the long-term future.

What, then, of the violent potential of militant environmentalists: or so-called ecoterrorism? Like the once-fashionable weapons of mass destruction scare, it is rather striking how little attention this phenomenon has received of late:

- Alex Schmid’s seminal 2011 *Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Studies* ignores it almost entirely: it is never properly discussed within its 718 pages.
- Even an impressionistic Internet trawl of media sources suggests a flurry of FBI concern around about 2008; and very little since.

This seems to correlate, more or less, with the duration of the Obama presidencies. And yet, Trump’s ‘Contract with the American Voter’ from October of last year makes clear that he wishes to tilt government priorities radically towards infrastructure improvement and job creation rather than environmental protection.
I think there is a good chance that massive protest is coming; and some of it may be violent. Given that the animus here is more widely focused on a broad raft of government initiatives and not so narrowly spotlighted on the person of Trump, I think the potential for disruption is considerable. On past precedent, it is perhaps likely to remain primarily focused on property destruction—but perhaps not entirely. I do not predict a sort of ‘Unabomber II’ with any confidence. But likewise, I would say I think it not absolutely beyond the realm of the possible.

Islamist Terrorism

All of which brings me onto what is rightly the main theme of this conference; what Donald Trump has termed the threat of ‘radical Islamic terrorism’. As has already been heard, there are many scholars far better qualified than I am to speak on what forms this threat—or perhaps, more accurately, these threats—may take and what the US government should do about them. Indeed, I have no insider knowledge here at all. I am only responding to Trump’s public statements; in particular, his declared intention at his inauguration to eradicate ‘radical Islamic terrorism’ from the face of the earth.

And I was struck here, on January 20th, 2017, by how very much this sort of commitment to total victory sounded like something out of the 20th century: out of the Age of Extremes, as the ‘Short Twentieth Century’ from the World Wars to the end of the Cold War has been called. It seemed (to me) to belong more to another time. It sounded broadly like President Roosevelt’s commitment to the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany; or President Reagan’s anti-Soviet rhetoric of Evil Empires. And, as many others have pointed out, it raises expectations of success that—to put it mildly—may be hard to fulfill.

But I was also struck by this largely because in general I tend to be struck by the differences between the Global War on Terror on the one hand and these 20th century conflicts on the other; and not the similarities. Indeed, as Bruce Hoffman writes, the War on Terror is all about trying to oppose the ‘non-traditional’ challenges to US national security and foreign policy imperatives posed by elusive and deadly irregular adversaries [my emphasis].

Here there does seem to be an apparent inherent tension between an ‘America First’ policy and the reality that a global threat will need to be countered with a global network of alliances. However irritating and unsatisfactory alliance partners may be, it seems hard to think that ‘America First’ could work as a global counterterrorism strategy, whatever it might mean in trade, or other areas. Perhaps Trump can help square that circle by—not unreasonably—leaning on NATO members to dig a bit deeper and pay what they are meant to.
But I do wonder whether some of the challenges, at least seen in a longer-term perspective, are deeper. As a 20th century historian, I am struck by the different trajectories over the past 70 years in social and cultural development on both sides of the Atlantic. Michael Mann, the sociologist, makes an argument that warfare and welfare often go together: welfare regimes are often built by governments as a sort of reward to populations for past sacrifices in wartime. That has certainly been the Western European experience. The contrast here is between home fronts in the Second World War. The entire death toll of civilians in the United States was, I think, six people, unlucky enough to be blown up by a Japanese firebomb. So welfare provision was geared largely to those who had made the greatest sacrifices—the military. And in that sense the American military can be seen to offer parallel welfare roles to what is, rightly or wrongly, more widely available in Western Europe.

But with all that goes a very significant, still resonant, effect of the Vietnam era, of the 1968 protests, where there was arguably a profound demilitarization of Western societies. I think that tendency went much further in Western Europe. I do not think that is a bad thing. I would much rather live in the Europe of 2017 than the Europe of 1917, for obvious reasons. But it does come at a price. That price—as Trump has said—is that many Western European societies have really taken their eye off the ball when it comes to planning an active defense posture.

And, for all that I have hinted at the differences between the Global War on Terror and the earlier grand struggles of the 20th century, there remains one major point of convergence, too. That is: there is a profoundly moral dimension to this struggle.

In his classic 1996 account of Allied victory in the Second World War, appropriately titled *Why the Allies Won*, the British historian Richard Overy took issue with the common view that Allied triumph was a simple triumph of the sheer weight of material resources. These mattered, certainly. But, disturbingly, Overy argues that the outcome of the war remained far more open and undecided for far longer than is often acknowledged. Forces with inferior performance often outperformed opponents who were better resourced but worse led and with indifferent morale. Above all, Overy’s argument that the ethical dimension to the war mattered is worth quoting at length. He writes:

“There is a striking moral contrast here. Whatever the rights or wrongs of the case, the Allies were successful in winning the moral high ground throughout the war. There are clear advantages in moral certainty and moral superiority. The Allied populations fought what they saw as a just war against aggression. They were able to appeal to neutral states to collaborate in a good cause; enthusiasm for war was straightforward; much was justified in the name of a higher ideal, such as the bombing, which provoked a real heart-searching only after the conflict was
over. It was impossibly difficult on the other hand, for the aggressor states to slough off their merited reputation for oppression and violation, although Axis leaders saw their own cause as just in their terms. In every theatre of war the language of liberation and resistance was directed against the Axis...The war was never, in reality, a simple war of good against evil, of civilisation against Dark Age, but the Allies’ ability to make it seem so simplified their war aims and cemented a domestic and international consensus in their favour.”

We can find older examples as well. It has been argued that one of the absolutely key contributions that American forces made to Allied victory on the Western Front in 1917-18 was their reputation for taking prisoners and treating them with at least minimal decency. Careful analysis of the German collapse in late 1918 has shown the key dynamics of sharply accelerating surrender rates to those Allied forces—definitely not the Australians!—who had the reputation for not machine-gunning prisoners when they put their hands up.

By contrast, just how many al-Qa’ida militants were persuaded to lay down their arms by those keen amateur photographers, Private Lynndie England and Sergeant Charles Graner? Surely, one could make a plausible argument that they have been the best recruiting sergeants that AQ ever had. And this is not meant as a cheap shot of anti-Americanism, I hasten to add: the British Army, too, had its own skeletons hidden away down in the Basra cupboard. The basic point is simply that a commitment to safeguarding human rights is not just the right, but also the wise, thing to do. Self-interest recommends it: not least because moral disasters have an unfortunate habit of becoming PR disasters, too.

But it is reflections such as these that lead me to be wary of the apparent hints from Trump that the administration might indeed look forward to a bonfire of due process in the name of abandoning self-defeating restraints.

Which brings me, albeit by circuitous routes, back to my starting point of what the historian might bring to the fundamentally futuristic question of ‘What next?’

I have tried humbly to suggest that the occasional glance backwards over our shoulders might have some value, even if it is only to survey a rich landscape of half-parallels. But, as guidance goes, half-parallels are a lot better than nothing.

In the end, though, when faced with the Sphinx-like inscrutability of the future, we perhaps have to fall back not upon the consolations of history, but of literature. I am thinking here of A.E. Houseman’s Fragment of a Greek Tragedy (which you can obligingly find on the Georgetown Classic Department’s website). Here the Chorus—whose job it is, of course, to sum up everything for the audience—concludes their rousing peroration with the uplifting reflection that:
...after pondering much

To this conclusion I at last have come:

LIFE IS UNCERTAIN.

I cannot improve on that profound insight so upon that note of resplendent agnosticism, I will leave it there.

About the Author

Tim Wilson was born in 1971, going to school in Cambridge and university in Oxford. His intellectual interests in conflict derive from working as a community worker in both North Belfast and East London in the later 1990s. Trained as an historian, his chief interest is in the widely differing effects political violence can have across different contexts. In over ten years of teaching and researching at top universities (Oxford, St Andrews, Queen’s Belfast) he has worked widely both on terrorism committed by governments, and by their opponents. Both his teaching and research have been recommended for prizes: indeed, his first book Frontiers of Violence—a grassroots comparison of different patterns of ethnic violence—was nominated for the Royal Historical Society’s prestigious Whitfield Prize in 2010. He is currently working upon a second book that seeks to ask why militant violence in Western societies has taken the forms that it has over the past 150 years, provisionally entitled: Terrorists: A Social History of Political Violence. He assumed the Directorship of CSTPV in September 2016.
What the Trump Administration Needs to Know: Lessons Learned from Fifteen Years of Counterterrorism Operations

Michael Vickers

Our war with al-Qa’ida, its allies, and offshoots is now in its sixteenth year, and shows no signs of ending anytime soon. It’s therefore critical, as we begin a new administration, to take an objective look at what’s worked, what hasn’t, and where we might go from here.

I have been engaged as a national security policy maker, operational strategist, and Intelligence Community leader for much of the past two decades, so in the next thirty minutes or so, I’d like to share with you what I believe are some strategic lessons learned from our war with the global jihadists. After I conclude my remarks, I’d be happy to take a few questions.

The War with Global Jihadists, Fifteen Years On

Before I share my thoughts with you on what’s worked and what hasn’t, I’d like to briefly review where we’ve been. Our war with al-Qa’ida and its allies began in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, but al-Qa’ida’s war with us, as former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice famously observed, began several years before. The 9/11 attacks exposed the severe weakness of containment as a CT strategy, and the consequences of treating global jihadi terrorism as just another form of terrorism.

In assessing where we are today, I find it useful to take five, ten, and fifteen year looks at the conflict. These three looks, I would suggest, tell us a lot about the strategic trajectory of the war.

2001–2006

In the first eighteen months after the 9/11 attacks, we had considerable success in rapidly toppling the Taliban regime; eliminating al-Qa’ida’s sanctuary in Afghanistan; capturing al-Qa’ida senior leaders as they sought sanctuary in Pakistan’s settled areas and around the world; building up our knowledge about al-Qa’ida’s strategy, operations, leadership, and organization; and preventing potential follow-on attacks. By 2006, however, we were bogged down and losing the war in Iraq, and sectarian conflict had made the counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and stability operations campaign much more violent. Al-Qa’ida had reconstituted its sanctuary in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, and the Pakistani Army had concluded a peace agreement with al-Qa’ida’s safe haven providers in North Waziristan and therefore with
al-Qa’ida. The Taliban senior leadership had reconstituted in Quetta, and was steadily expanding its insurgency in Afghanistan. Al-Qa’ida core had extended its reach through several franchises in other areas of the world, morphing from a terrorist group with global reach to one with semi-global presence. The result was a series of successful al-Qa’ida attacks in Europe, a potential 9/11-scale attack against trans-Atlantic aviation using novel technology that was fortunately disrupted before it could be executed, and an expansion of the conflict to additional theaters.

2006–2011

In the summer of 2008, President Bush approved a series of new policies that resulted in the second great US offensive against core al-Qa’ida. The new policies—among them, greater US autonomy in deciding to strike targets and expanded targeting criteria—produced immediate and dramatic results. Whereas US counterterrorism forces had been “Oh for Oh-Seven” in failing to take a single core al-Qa’ida high value target off the battlefield in the FATA in 2007, we were “Eight for Oh-Eight” in 2008. More strikes were conducted against core al-Qa’ida in the last five months of 2008 than had been in the previous four years.

President Obama sustained these aggressive CT policies through 2012. By the end of 2010, core al-Qa’ida was forced to go to ground in its FATA sanctuary. Five years ago this past May, Usama bin Ladin was killed, and in September 2011, a major threat in Yemen, Anwar al-Awlaki, was eliminated. The al-Qa’ida threat in Saudi Arabia had also been greatly reduced.

The war in Iraq was dramatically turned around, and by 2010, al-Qa’ida’s franchise in Iraq had been largely pushed out of Iraq’s urban areas and its strength reduced by 90 percent. Shia extremist groups had also been largely brought to heel. Two thousand eleven represents the high water mark for US counterterrorism strategy.

On the negative side of the ledger, however, we had a very close call with the 2009 Christmas Day plot to blow up an airliner over Detroit, and al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula continued to make dangerous innovations in bomb-making technology. The Arab Spring significantly expanded al-Qa’ida’s battlespace in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, and the Taliban insurgency grew steadily worse until it was pushed back for a brief period by the surge of forces in Afghanistan.

2011–2016

The five years since the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks have been predominantly characterized by the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and its separation from al-
Qa’ida; the civil war in Syria, which has served as a magnet for global jihadists; further global jihadist expansion on the African continent and Indian sub-continent; a Huthi takeover of Yemen; a series of attacks against the West; and increasing estrangement from the United States by many of our Sunni allies. ISIL’s capabilities and global expansion grew at a far more rapid pace than had al-Qa’ida’s, and ISIL supplanted al-Qa’ida as the leader of the global jihadist movement, at least for the time being.

On the positive side, we have had some success in continuing to eliminate al-Qa’ida HVTs and organizational capabilities and disrupt attack plans, in pushing back AQ’s gains in northern Mali and ejecting al-Shabaab out of Mogadishu, in reducing the territory controlled by ISIL and eliminating several of its key leaders, external plotters, and organizational capabilities, and in building up Afghan security forces.

To sum up, our war with the global jihadists is far from over. A 9/11-scale attack on the US homeland has thus far been prevented, and core al-Qa’ida has been brought closer to operational defeat than ever before. But the societal conditions and asymmetric competition that have given rise to the war have not fundamentally changed. Indeed, they are getting worse.

Al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula remains a dangerous adversary, and al-Qa’ida’s other franchises remain viable. Al-Qa’ida’s regeneration, even in Pakistan’s tribal areas, cannot be ruled out. If ISIL soon loses its physical caliphate, which I hope it does, it will be down, but not out. Sectarian conflict, religious identity, and vulnerable populations will continue to create strategic opportunity for the global jihadist brand. Global Jihad 3.0 should not surprise us where it appears.

Our war with the global jihadists has several similarities, though also many fundamental differences, with our Cold War conflict with the Soviet Empire. Both the Cold War and the war with al-Qa’ida, its allies and offshoots are, at their core, ideological conflicts waged on a global battleground. Both grew out of a previous war, and both took advantage of strengthened positions from victory in the previous war and vulnerable populations. Both conflicts have included secondary or associated wars that have diverted resources and widened the conflict. During the Cold War, the United States started strong, lost its way in the middle, and finished strong. A similar pattern may be emerging in our war with the global jihadists.

The Ends, Ways, and Means of US Counterterrorism Strategy

I’ll now turn to the heart of my talk: what’s worked and what hasn’t in US counterterrorism strategy. I’ll discuss five operational strategies that, in my view, have performed best in our CT fight. These five operational strategies form an integrated strategic approach, and
are much less effective if employed separately or partially. I'll then discuss four broader strategies that have produced poorer results or have failed entirely.

Let me begin first, however, by briefly reviewing the ends, ways, and means of our counterterrorism strategy. In broad terms, we have sought to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat global jihadist groups and prevent their regeneration. We have endeavored to this by strengthening our defenses, denying these groups sanctuary and resources, taking away their global reach, eliminating their organizational capabilities at a rate faster than they can replace them, and building up the capabilities of our many foreign partners to prevent defeated global jihadist groups from regenerating. We have employed both direct and indirect approaches as part of our strategy, and during our fifteen-year war with al-Qa’ida, its allies, and offshoots, we have fallen victim to both strategic overreach and strategic under reach.

**Five Operational Strategies That Have Worked**

What has worked best are five integrated, operational strategies: (1) hardening our defenses; (2) conducting intelligence-driven operations and pursuing intelligence integration; (3) conducting aggressive and sustained offensive campaigns that combine mass, precision, high operational tempo, covert partnerships, and multiple forms of combat power; (4) advising and assisting partner forces; and (5) building and leading a global network of partners to restrict the reach of global jihadist groups. Let’s look briefly at each.

**Hardened Defenses**

Hardening our defenses, while neither strategically sufficient nor foolproof, has made us safer. In the aviation field, these actions have ranged from restricting travel by potential terrorists, to making airliners less vulnerable to takeover, implementing improved screening at airports, and restricting items that can be brought onboard. Security at critical facilities and of critical materials has also significantly improved. The FBI’s transformation in the years after the 9/11 attacks has dramatically improved our domestic intelligence capabilities. As recent attacks in the United States and Europe have shown, however, there is no shortage of soft targets, and AQ and ISIL have shifted their targeting priorities accordingly.

**Intelligence-Driven Operations and Intelligence Integration**

Intelligence from multiple sources—human penetrations, detainee debriefings, signals intelligence of all sorts, full-motion video imagery, and liaison reporting—has been the motor that has driven CT operations. It has been central to our war with al-Qa’ida, its allies, and
offs. Intelligence has placed al-Qa’ida and ISIL’s senior leaders, operatives, and safe haven providers “on the X,” as we say in the business, for targeting by Predator and other air strikes and raids by special operations forces, and has made them vulnerable to joint capture operations by our many foreign partners. Intelligence gained from sensitive site exploitation and interrogation has led to additional operations in a virtuous cycle. Aggressive foreign and domestic intelligence operations have disrupted numerous plots. Intelligence integration—domestic and foreign and across intelligence disciplines—has made US intelligence far more effective, and all-source analysis has given us a detailed understanding of al-Qa’ida and ISIL’s strategy, operations and organization. Intelligence has had its share of—the Khost bombing, the AQAP plot to blow up an airliner over Detroit, the rapid takeover of Sunni areas in Iraq by ISIL and others—but on the whole, it has been a critical source of US advantage.

*Aggressive and Sustained Precision Strike Campaigns*

The heart of US counterterrorism strategy over the past fifteen years has been aggressive and sustained offensive campaigns that have combined mass, precision, high operational tempo, covert partnerships, and multiple forms of combat power to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qa’ida, ISIL, and their allies, and deny them any sanctuary. Our most successful campaigns have been the campaign to topple the Taliban in 2001 and the campaign to defeat core al-Qa’ida in Pakistan’s tribal areas. Although insufficient to prevent al-Qa’ida in Iraq’s reconstitution as ISIL, our campaigns against AQI and Shia extremist groups were also very effective.

The combination of mass, precision, and high operational tempo has been central to the success of US air power. Heavy bombers armed with precision weapons rapidly broke the back of the Taliban in 2001. Covert relationships with key foreign partners, policy changes put in place by President Bush in the summer of 2008 (and continued by President Obama) with regard to US strike autonomy and targeting criteria, a dramatic increase in the number of Predator platforms dedicated to the national CT campaign, continuous innovations in sensors, and a very high operational tempo have played a critical role in bringing core al-Qa’ida close to operational defeat. These same tools have likewise proven effective in disrupting plots by AQAP.

Raides by special operations forces have also been very effective, but only when conducted on a sustained basis and at a very high operational tempo or against a very strategic target, such as Usama bin Ladin. Precision Predator strikes have been very effective at an operational tempo of one strike every other day. Our most effective raid campaigns have sustained an operational tempo as high as ten or more a night.
Advising and Assisting Partner Forces

Advising and assisting indigenous ground forces to enable them to exploit the effects of precision air strikes has also been an effective strategy. The combination of direct air and indirect ground operations was very successful in Afghanistan in late 2001, and to a lesser extent, in Libya in 2011 and in Syria in 2016. Allowing US advisors to engage in combat along side their partner forces, having policies that are aligned with the aims of our foreign partners, and partners whose reach is congruent with our campaign objectives have been keys to success.

Joint capture operations were a very effective line of operation for years in Pakistan. Arming local tribal elements has also been very successful under the right conditions, and has put additional pressure on al-Qa’ida and its allies in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The Afghan Local Police program successfully denied rural areas to the Taliban, and pound for pound, was one of our most effective counterinsurgency instruments. Raids using partner forces were effective in Iraq 2010 and 2011, and in Afghanistan 2013 to 2016. More limited advise and assist operations supporting third country partners were likewise effective in Somalia 2012 to 2016, and in Mali 2012 to 2016.

The Global Counterterrorism Network

Through its leadership of a global counterterrorism network, the United States has been able to leverage the capabilities of numerous foreign partners to disrupt plots within partner nations and across national boundaries and capture global jihadist operatives. The GCTN is growing in importance as global jihadist groups increasingly shift from directed to inspired attacks, and our Muslim partners are central to the GCTN. Alienating them is a bad idea.

Four Strategies That Haven’t Worked

Let’s now turn to strategies that have failed entirely or have worked far less well. I group them into four broad categories: first, strategies of containment and limited engagement; second, strategies that have sought to engender region-wide catalytic effects through regime change and transformational change through large-scale nation building; third, strategies based on an overly narrow view of the conflict—what I call “strategic myopia;” and fourth, strategies that place all their hopes on a dubious international partner.

Strategies of Containment and Limited Engagement

Containment is a very poor CT strategy. It failed before 9/11, and it was failing in Syria and Libya before our recent interventions. Even the most isolated territory is connected to the
wider world. A close relative to containment, limited engagement, has also fared poorly as a strategy. It has been tried in Libya after the fall of Qaddafi, in Syria, and in Yemen.

Undue constraints on US air power and limiting ground advisers to non-combat roles have also produced poor results, resulting in protracted conflict and increased risk. US precision air power has generally faced tighter policy constraints in Yemen than it has in Pakistan’s tribal areas. As a consequence, we have been far more effective against core al-Qa’ida than we have been against AQAP. In temporal terms, we were far more effective in terms of precision CT strikes during the first Obama term than we have been during the second, when new presidential guidance placed greater restrictions on Predator strikes.

Similarly, we conducted a far more aggressive bombing campaign in 2001 against the Taliban than we have against ISIL, with the result that the Taliban were toppled in a few months, while our campaign against ISIL is well into its third year. Policy constraints limiting ground advisors to non-combat roles have produced similar disparities in strategic outcomes. ISIL is an army and a state as well as a terrorist group, and must be fought using instruments and strategies appropriate to each.

Strategies to Catalyze Democratic Change and Transform Nations

Promoting democratic values and supporting democratic institutions is rightly a central pillar of American foreign policy. As a counterterrorism strategy, however, it has failed to produce the effects its planners had hoped for, in Iraq and across the region. Similarly, US efforts at large-scale nation building have struggled in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and, on a more reduced scale, in Yemen. Capacity building has been most effective with intelligence and security services and least effective with civil institutions. Advising and assisting partner forces has produced much better results than capacity building efforts alone.

In post-conflict stability operations, we have oscillated between doing too much and doing too little. This has perhaps been our most vexing challenge, but we must find a way to win a sustainable peace. We can’t abandon a region as we did in Afghanistan after the Cold War without incurring great risk, and we should have been more engaged with security assistance in Libya after the fall of Qaddafi.

Strategies Based on an Overly Narrow View of the Conflict

US counterterrorism strategy has also suffered from strategic myopia—taking too narrow a view of the conflict in several cases, and getting bogged down in secondary conflicts in others. In Yemen, our narrow focus on AQAP resulted in blinders to the threat emanating from the
Huthis and their partner in crime, Ali Abdullah Saleh. As a result of this myopia and a failure to provide assistance when it was needed, we lost a critical CT partner.

In Syria, we have likewise taken a narrow view of the conflict, focusing primarily on ISIL while largely ignoring the implications that the wider conflict between the Assad regime, Iran, Hizballah and Russia, and the Syrian opposition and their Sunni allies has for strategic success in the CT fight and for the future of the Middle East. We will need a friendly Syrian government to prevail in the long run.

Like the Cold War before it, our war with al-Qa’ida, its allies, and offshoots has also shown a tendency to elevate the strategic importance of secondary conflicts. This has certainly been the case with our counterinsurgency and nation building efforts in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

*Strategies That Rely on a Dubious Partner*

Partnering with Russia in Syria has, in my view, made a very challenging strategic situation there even worse. Its effect has been to weaken our allies and strengthen our enemies. Russia’s recent use of political active measures against the United States, moreover, would seem to make partnering with them going forward a non-starter, if its covert aggression in Ukraine and if its actions against our interests in Syria already haven’t.

*Where Do We Go From Here?*

I’d like to conclude by leaving you with three thoughts on the way forward for US counterterrorism strategy.

First, we need to base on our strategy on the Middle East as it is, not as we wish it to be. The region is in historic flux, and we’re in a period where governance is challenged by powerful societal trends not just in the Middle East, but globally. Strategy is most effective when it is aligned with key trends rather than trying to combat them. A number of strategy implications flow from this: being careful about which regimes to pressure and how hard, working with sub-national elements for stability in appropriate cases, *et cetera.*

Second, we should focus on what’s worked best in counterterrorism strategy, while adapting to the evolving threat. I have three recommendations here. Our new administration should review and revise Presidential Policy Guidance to restore greater agility, diversity, and effectiveness to Predator strikes. The Predator has been our most effective CT instrument, and it is currently being underutilized. Our new administration should also review policy restrictions on ground combat advisors to make indirect ground operations more effective, and further intensify
the bombing campaign against ISIL. Finally, given the increased domestic terrorism threat, we must look at providing the FBI with additional resources.

Third, we need to win not just the operational counterterrorism fight, but also the wider proxy war that is being waged across the region. Strategic success in the CT fight depends on it, as does the future of the Middle East. This means substantially strengthening efforts to support the Syrian opposition; pressuring Russia, Iran, and Lebanese Hezbollah to withdraw from Syria and abandon the Assad regime; repairing our frayed ties with our Sunni allies; providing greater support to the Hadi government in exile in Yemen; and providing greater support to fragile friendly regimes after they come to power.

We have had great operational success before in analogous situations, and we can succeed going forward. Three campaigns serve as models for me for the CT fight and the broader war for the Middle East: Afghanistan in 2001, the campaign against core al-Qaeda 2008 to 2012, and Afghanistan in the 1980s.

None of this will be easy. We face challenges to world order not just in the Middle East, but in Europe and Eurasia and East Asia as well. Prevailing over these three grand strategic challenges will require strategic persistence and resilience and new approaches for new times. But prevail we must.

About the Author

Dr. Michael Vickers was the principal strategist for the covert war that drove the Soviets out of Afghanistan and helped bring an end to the Cold War—the largest and most successful covert action program in the history of the CIA. A quarter century later, he played a major policy and planning role in the war with al-Qa’ida and in the operation that killed Usama bin Laden. From 2011 to 2015, Vickers served as the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, an $80 billion, 180,000-person, global operation that includes the National Security Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, and the National Reconnaissance Office. From 2007 to 2011, he served as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations, Low-Intensity Conflict, and Interdependent Capabilities. Earlier in his career, he served in the Special Forces and in the CIA’s Clandestine Service. Dr. Vickers is a recipient of the Presidential National Security Medal, our nation’s highest award in intelligence and national security. He holds a B.A. from the University of Alabama, an M.B.A. from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, and a Ph.D. from the Johns Hopkins University.
There is an interesting debate about contemporary violent non-state actors (VNSAs): Have we seen this all before? One article I habitually assign to classes I teach about VNSAs is Reyko Huang’s “The Islamic State as an Ordinary Insurgency.” Huang argues that the Islamic State, or ISIS, “is hardly unique among armed non-state organizations.” Addressing various factors that commentators believe distinguish ISIS from past VNSAs, Huang argues that none of them are truly new. ISIS is no more brutal, she argues, than the Khmer Rouge or the RENAMO movement in Mozambique; it is not unique in “mobilizing its own interpretation of theology as part of an ideological-political campaign”; numerous previous VNSAs also built “networks of traffickers, dealers, and middlemen to secure enormous wealth from natural resources”; and the fact that ISIS created systems of governance does not distinguish it. Huang contends that rather than trying to normalize ISIS, she wants to produce more rigorous thinking about the group by demonstrating that it “is not as exceptional as observers and the media have often characterized it.”

I like to assign Huang’s article because each step she makes is logical and correct in and of itself—yet her conclusion is entirely wrong. Figuring out why it’s wrong takes a lot of work; my students are typically persuaded by her points.

So where does Huang’s argument go wrong? If the factors that might distinguish ISIS from other VNSAs are only those that she considers—brutality, theology, profits, or governance—then her answer is correct. But here’s a different frame for distinguishing ISIS from its predecessors: speed, scope, and impact. No previous VNSA has, without state support, expanded as rapidly to become a strategic challenge in as many countries as ISIS. No previous VNSA has been able to spearhead a terrorist campaign akin to ISIS’s Ramadan 2016 offensive, which killed hundreds of civilians in high-profile attacks across ten countries.2

---

Put simply, the inputs that make ISIS may look like the VNSAs of old (though Huang’s examination of each input individually may be an error, as the group may look distinctive when they’re examined in combination), but the outputs are, to this point, unique. The uniqueness of the results ISIS has achieved is, of course, due in large part to advances in technology. No other major VNSA was able to take advantage of social media right out of the gate as a means of recruiting, and thus spreading its movement globally. No other VNSA has had the communications capabilities and end-to-end encryption needed to provide the advantages of physical terrorist networks to operatives who have never had in-person contact with the group’s members in the way that ISIS has with its “virtual planner” model.3

It may be objected that these differences are a product of ISIS’s operating environment, rather than being inherent to the actor itself. But such objections miss the point. It is impossible to categorize an actor as an “ordinary insurgency” if exogenous factors make it function in fundamentally different ways than insurgencies of the past.

ISIS is distinctive. And the truly worrying news is that its uniqueness may not last, because other VNSAs can use current and future technologies to replicate, and even expand upon, its successes. This is why it matters whether we categorize ISIS as an ordinary insurgency or recognize that we are seeing something new: VNSAs are empowered, relative to the state, in a way they have never been since the Westphalian state achieved its absolute dominance over competing forms of political organization during the twentieth century.

That “Westphalian moment” is now coming to an end. And it is vital that we not deceive ourselves into thinking we are now experiencing something that we have already seen in the not so distant past.

Misunderstanding the Problem: The al-Qa’ida/ISIS Competition

Not only is ISIS’s distinctiveness unlikely to last; it is not even the most formidable VNSA challenger that we face.

One of the major defining storylines in the Middle East and North Africa is the competition between al-Qa’ida and ISIS for dominance over the transnational Salafi jihadist movement. Even a cursory analysis of this intra-jihadist competition highlights how the problem

---

set of VNSAs has often been misunderstood by analysts. A couple of years ago, the vast majority of analysts concluded that ISIS had overtaken al-Qa’ida. In its most extreme form, this argument contended that, “al-Qa’ida is most certainly a distant number two in jihadi circles,” and suggested that the group could even disband before 2016.¹

ISIS was expected to fundamentally disrupt the al-Qa’ida network, and analysts believed there was a real chance that al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula or al-Qa’ida’s Somali affiliate al-Shabaab would defect entirely and join Team ISIS. None of this occurred. While ISIS is now perceptibly weakened since its height in 2014-15, al-Qa’ida is perceptibly stronger. The divergent trajectory of the two groups was foreseeable even when analysts believed that ISIS either had eclipsed, or was in the process of eclipsing, al-Qa’ida.

Al-Qa’ida had long wanted to change the way it was viewed in majority-Muslim countries, as documents recovered from bin Ladin’s Abbottabad, Pakistan compound demonstrate. In a May 2010 letter to senior al-Qa’ida official Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, bin Ladin proposed a “new phase” in al-Qa’ida’s campaign that would “correct [the mistakes] we made,” and “reclaim … the trust of a large segment of those who lost their trust in the jihadis.”⁵ In a separate letter to Nasir al-Wuhayshi, the emir of al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula, Atiyah expounded on the need to win over the Muslim population, noting that “the people’s support to the mujahedin is as important as the water for fish.”⁶ Al-Qa’ida leaders even considered changing the group’s name to distance it from the toxic legacy of al-Qa’ida in Iraq (as ISIS was once known), which al-Qa’ida leaders saw as the biggest black mark on their reputation.⁷

In fact, al-Qa’ida did change its name as it expanded into North Africa, using front groups that were labeled Ansar al-Sharia. But no single development gave al-Qa’ida as much opportunity to change the way it was perceived as ISIS’s rise, and al-Qa’ida’s ability to publicly distinguish itself from ISIS. Al-Qa’ida contrasted its more restrained approach with ISIS’s over-the-top brutality; portrayed itself as the more controllable jihadist alternative to GCC states who saw it as a possible asset in their conflict with Iran; and its officials at times exaggerated ISIS’s

---


strategic position and downplayed al-Qa’ida’s own strengths, in order to make al-Qa’ida appear less threatening. Al-Qa’ida has positioned itself, without moderating at all, closer to the mainstream of regional politics.\(^8\)

We can now see the results. Today, al-Qa’ida is able to operate more openly than it ever has. The kind of charities that the United States worked so hard to shut down just after the 9/11 attacks are back in business, with fundraising for al-Qa’ida occurring openly in some countries.\(^9\) Al-Qa’ida’s Syrian branch is now part of a massive coalition known as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham with a number of other major rebel groups—some of which were once regarded as moderate by outside observers—and it has opened itself up to growing state support.

In short, while the international community focused on ISIS, al-Qa’ida outmaneuvered the world’s most powerful states, and transformed itself from an international pariah into a stronger organization than it has ever been. The United States’ lack of understanding of what al-Qa’ida was up to—its myopic focus on ISIS even as al-Qa’ida was in the process of dramatically “rebranding” itself—contributed to al-Qa’ida’s success.

 Indeed, the number of times that analysts have fundamentally misread important developments related to VNSAs over the past half-dozen years, only to have these VNSAs prosper due to these flawed analytic paradigms, is striking. The most prominent example is analysts’ misreading of the strategic impact of the revolutionary events that rocked the Middle East and North Africa in 2011. A *New York Times* article by Scott Shane, published on February 27\(^{th}\), 2011, summarizes the consensus view that then existed:

“For nearly two decades, the leaders of Al Qaeda have denounced the Arab world’s dictators as heretics and puppets of the West and called for their downfall. Now, people in country after country have risen to topple their leaders—and Al Qaeda has played absolutely no role. In fact, the motley opposition movements that have appeared so suddenly and proved so powerful have shunned the two central tenets of the Qaeda credo: murderous violence and religious fanaticism. The demonstrators have used force defensively, treated Islam as an afterthought and embraced democracy, which is anathema to Osama bin Laden and his followers. So for Al Qaeda—and perhaps no less for the American policies that have been built around the threat it poses—the democratic revolutions that have

---


gripped the world’s attention present a crossroads. Will the terrorist network shrivel slowly to irrelevance? Or will it find a way to exploit the chaos produced by political upheaval and the disappointment that will inevitably follow hopes now raised so high? For many specialists on terrorism and the Middle East, though not all, the past few weeks have the makings of an epochal disaster for Al Qaeda…”

In Scott Shane’s article, the sole dissent he registered to this extraordinarily optimistic view came from former CIA analyst Michael Scheuer, who warned about the release of imprisoned jihadists and al-Qa’ida’s ability to expand its geographic reach. Of Scheuer’s dissenting view, Shane recalled in his later book Objective Troy that he thought at the time: “But surely, … Scheuer’s spoilsport take on the surge of young Muslims demanding democracy and the fall of despots must be wrong.” The giddiness over the Arab Uprisings extended also to the Obama White House, as well as the CIA.

As with the competition between al-Qa’ida and ISIS, the Arab Uprisings did not turn out as the consensus of analysts believed it would. And as with that intra-jihadist competition, misreading the impact of the revolutions proved costly.

The Wrong Toolkit

We need to understand how the VNSA problem set has often been misdiagnosed because the fundamental question, what do we do about it?, cannot be answered without acknowledging this record of analytic error. Are analysts taking the necessary steps to get vital questions about VNSAs right in the future?

Contrary to Huang’s argument, today’s VNSAs are very different than those of the past. Contemporary VNSAs are truly a twenty-first century problem. We are combating them with a

---

13 For discussion of the White House’s view, see ibid. For discussion of the CIA’s view, see Michael Morell, The Great War of Our Time: The CIA's Fight Against Terrorism from al Qa’ida to ISIS (New York: Twelve, 2015). Morell recalled that his agency “thought and told policy-makers that this outburst of popular revolt would damage al Qa’ida by undermining the group’s narrative. Our analysts figured that the protests would send a signal throughout the region that political change was possible without al Qa’ida’s leading the way and without the violence that al Qa’ida said was necessary.”
twentieth century governmental architecture, and analytic errors are one outcropping of our outmoded system.

One of the analogies I frequently use to contextualize the competition between VNSAs and the state is that of start-up companies against legacy industries in the economic sphere.\(^{14}\) In the economic sphere, behemoth companies like Borders Books or Blockbuster have been completely displaced by younger competitors. Why?

Borders Group, Inc. was once a bookselling empire. At its peak in 2005, the company operated over 1,200 stores across the globe, boasted revenues of $4 billion a year, and employed around 15,000 people.\(^{15}\) Six years later, it was gone, shuttering the last of its stores. Ironically, the same thing that initially made Borders successful—technological innovation—proved to be its undoing. In 1971, Louis and Tom Borders, two brothers who attended the University of Michigan, devised the “Book Inventory System,” which allowed them to tailor their stores’ inventory to local consumer preferences. The brothers used this innovation to open new stores across the country, and across the world.\(^{16}\)

The Borders brothers eventually sold the company, and it ended up behind the technology curve. Borders did not launch a website until 1998, three years after Amazon.com appeared. When the chain tried to adopt new technologies, it seemingly failed to understand their purpose. In 2008, Borders launched a program that would allow customers to download books and music, but only if the customers physically entered the chain’s bookstores and used “download stations”—thus undercutting the purpose of online shopping. Borders collapsed in the face of challenges from e-books, Amazon, and even Barnes and Noble, its more adaptive brick-and-mortar competitor.

The fall of Borders is a powerful sign of how legacy companies—established firms that possess strong brand names, but fail to adapt to the new business environment—can fail outright in an age of rapid technological innovation. Other dominos include Blockbuster (displaced by Netflix) and Eastman Kodak, a name once synonymous with photography, which was sent reeling by digital photography.\(^{17}\) One legacy company after another ended up the victim of outmoded business models, too much bureaucracy, too much overhead, too little innovation and

\(^{14}\) For my most comprehensive treatment of this analogy, see Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, “The Lean Terrorist Cell: How Startup Companies and Violent Non-State Actors Are Changing the Old World Order,” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Summer/Fall 2016.


\(^{17}\) Dawn McCarthy and Beth Jinks, “Kodak Files for Bankruptcy as Digital Era Spells End to Film,” Bloomberg, January 19, 2012.
adaptation, and, often, blind adherence to tradition. Start-up firms thrived: sleek and agile companies that could respond creatively to the challenges and opportunities of new technologies. Start-ups upended the status quo.

This is obviously analogous to the forces transforming global politics, where VNSAs have been able to quickly evolve, adapt, and cleverly exploit emerging technologies. VNSAs can be seen as the start-up actors of the political organizing space. Governments, in turn, look a lot like legacy industries.

So what do we do about this? The first step, I think, is recognition of the underlying problem. Getting smarter against VNSAs is not a simple matter of crafting laundry lists of one’s preferred policies, or divining the ever-elusive counterterrorism grand strategy. Rather, it involves recognition that the design of our government is ill-suited to this challenge.

Lao-tzu observed in the *Tao Te Ching* that, “knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom.”¹⁸ When it comes to VNSAs, the fact that we do not know ourselves impedes our understanding of the enemy. To have a twenty-first century toolkit, we must have a government architecture that is equal to the present challenges.

About the Author

Daveed Gartenstein-Ross is a Senior Fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, the Chief Executive Officer of Valens Global, and an Adjunct Assistant Professor in Georgetown University’s Security Studies Program. His professional focus is on violent non-state actors (VNSAs). Known for his scholarship and for putting ideas into action as a practitioner, Gartenstein-Ross is the author or volume editor of twenty-two books and monographs. He has testified on his areas of core competency before the US House and Senate a dozen times, as well as before the Canadian House of Commons. He holds a Ph.D. in world politics from the Catholic University of America and a J.D. from the New York University School of Law.

The Myth of Homegrown Terrorism

Jytte Klausen

The enduring legacy of ISIS will be to have recruited more people to the global jihad movement than any previous terrorist organization. In June 2014, Raqqa became the capital city of the Islamic State. The new “caliphate” became one great ethnic melting pot. With minimal adaptation, ISIS used the same methods to attract volunteers from Asia, Africa, North America, and Europe. Frenchmen and Britons executed Syrians and Iraqis in their own villages. Pakistanis moved on to the new “provinces” and command ISIS’s troops in Libya. The truck attack in December 2016 in Berlin involved ISIS operatives based in Libya. Estimates are that, since 2013, 40,000 foreign fighters drawn from 100 countries were drawn to the jihadist organizations fighting in Syria and Iraq. The majority of the volunteers went to the Islamic State but many have joined other jihadist fighter groups in the region. The foreign fighter population included about 4,500 to 6,000 migrants from Western Europe who, once they arrived in the “caliphate,” began patrolling the streets of Raqqa as the new masters.

Europe in the Crosshairs

The new geopolitical reality of jihadist migration in the Mediterranean region will continue to pose severe challenges to Europe’s domestic security. Evidence of the escalation of terrorist capacities caused by ISIS recruitment strategies was amply provided by the attacks in Paris on November 13th, 2015 on the Bataclan theater and restaurants in the Marais and suicide attacks at a soccer stadium. Subsequent attacks in Brussels on March 22nd, 2016, carried out by the same network targeted the airport and a metro station near the European Union headquarters. Terrorist impact is often measured in casualties and in this respect the scope of the attacks was significant: 130 killed in Paris and 32 in Brussels. Grievous harm was done to many hundreds more. But terrorism aims to intimidate the public with the intention of forcing the

hands of governments, and in this too the attackers were successful. The attacks forced Europe to collectively face the risks to domestic security posed by the presence of a “jihadistan” a car ride away from some of Europe’s major metropolitan cities. They also further exacerbated the already contentious domestic debate over Muslims’ place in Europe and their collective guilt for jihadist extremism.

The Belgians took much of the blame. Two neighborhoods in Brussels, Molenbeek and Schaerbeek, were widely portrayed as the home base for attackers. “The Islamic State of Molenbeek” ran a headline on The New York Times’ opinion pages that went on to describe Molenbeek as “the most acute manifestation of a European failure” to integrate Muslims. Belgium’s ineffectual judicial system has a lot to account for when it comes to the country’s failure to control extremism, but Brussels was less responsible for growing the massive network than has been assumed.

Molenbeek is a mixed neighborhood comprised of bars and restaurants, immigrant families, and hipsters and artists. It does not deserve the stereotype. The chilling part was that the operatives responsible for the attacks were able to return to the city and hide among family and friends while they planned their attacks—and afterwards. Terrorist networks rely on social capital, and this network was able to call upon a lot of such social resources for its evil purposes. Several of the key operatives grew up in Brussels, where they spent much of their youths in gangs as they gravitated to extremism. But the network also included Frenchmen and young men from small towns and midsized cities elsewhere in Europe, as well as Syrians and Iraqis who never set foot in Europe before they converged on Paris, ordered there by their ISIS handlers. The scope of this attack network was far larger than anything seen before in Europe. This was an example of the merger of multiple micro-networks into one cohesive organization. The term “homegrown” terrorism fails to capture its origin and the scope of the network.

From information gathered by late January 2017, we identified 85 individuals who belonged to the inner circle of the perpetrators of the Paris and Brussels attacks. Using a network graphing program, the connections between the individuals and their links to the various violent conspiracies and organizations that were identified as part of the network were drawn (see Figure 1). The information was drawn from public sources and only terrorist acts verified by authorities were recorded. It is fair to assume that our methodology underestimates the true reach of the network.

---

The network was responsible for at least eleven violent plots, of which six were successful and the rest foiled. The perpetrators of a series of well-known incidents before and after the Paris and Brussels attacks, starting in 2014 through 2016, were closely connected to the key operatives in the Franco-Belgian network. These include the 2014 shooting at the Jewish Museum in Brussels, the coordinated attacks on the Charlie Hebdo editorial office and a Jewish supermarket (here counted as one inter-connected conspiracy), and other shootings by the same men, as well as an attack on a high-speed train between Brussels and Paris in 2015 that did not come off as planned when the gunman was tackled by passengers. Among those foiled was a plot to kidnap a
Belgian policeman and execute him for a YouTube production and a planned suicide attack on the La Defense district in Paris scheduled for a few days after the November 13th attacks. An attack on Schiphol Airport near Amsterdam that some of the Brussels-based members of the network have been reported to have been considering was not included in the graphing of the network because the planning appears to not have been advanced. Another deadly attack, the 2016 Bastille Day attack in Nice, was not found to tie in with the Brussels-Paris network and is therefore not included in our graphing of the network.

Using a snowball method to include first-person contacts from this inner circle, a total of 352 individuals were identified as having been linked to terrorist actions and arrests related to the core network. Of these, 319 were arrested and 86 died in terrorist incidents—in Europe or abroad. 26 of those who have died belonged to the inner circle. Getting arrested does not preclude dying later in a terrorist incidents, which is why the number of arrested and dead combined is higher than the total number of people identified as members of the network. One of the criticisms against Belgian judicial practices has been that too many suspects are arrested and then let back on the street awaiting later trial giving them opportunity and incentive to join a jihadist organization abroad.

The analysis highlighted nine recruitment organizations based in Europe that drove the initial recruitment to ISIS and the formation of the network. Two Belgium-based groups were particularly important meeting places. One was the Brussels-based Zerkani network named after Khalid Zerkani, a 42-year old street preacher from Morocco. Another was the now banned Sharia4Belgium, an offshoot of the British preacher Anjem Choudary’s empire of similarly named organizations. These organizations are well known incubators of extremism but the inclusion of several older French recruitment rings highlight how today’s terrorist networks grow from yesterday’s. One such group is the so-called 19th Arrondissement group, also known as “filière irakienne”—Brothers for Iraq—that was dismantled in 2005. The group recruited young men from the Paris area to fight for al-Qa’ida in Iraq against US troops.

---

4 The data collection draws on the Western Jihadism Project, a comprehensive database charting the evolution of al-Qa’ida-related networks since the early 1990s.
6 The sociogram produced by the analysis reveals a contiguous and overlapping attack network that These are all first-person connections so that if A ➔ B and B ➔ C, then A, B, and C are included. A and C may not have met face to face but are networked through what Mark Granovetter, the Stanford sociologist, called “weak links,” peer-based influence networks.
To get a better handle on the origins of the network, we collected data about the militants’ hometowns, here defined as the individual’s last known living location before his or her first known terrorism-related act. The assumption is that this was the initial site of the radicalization process that put the person on the path to join the terrorist network. From this information we constructed a “heat” map of the hometowns (depicted in Figure 2).

Brussels was a hotspot but the involvement of militants from the United Kingdom and Scandinavia and from small and medium-sized cities in France and Holland puts new light on how and where terrorist networks are formed. The concept of “homegrown” terrorism has for the past decade and a half been used to describe individuals who act alone or in small groups on behalf of al-Qa’ida and now ISIS without any direct or formal connection to the foreign terrorist organizations. The concept is profoundly misleading.

The futility of focusing on “homegrown” terrorism rather than the transnational organization that sustains terrorist recruitment was further underscored by the fact that the network included 41 non-Western individuals, whose countries of last residence—before the Islamic State—were Saudi Arabia (10), Morocco (7), Algeria (4), Tunisia (4). Several other countries contributed 1 or 2 individuals.

![Figure 2. Heat map showing the hometowns of individuals who have publicly been identified by law enforcement as participants or suspected participants in the network responsible for the attacks in Paris and Brussels between 2014–2016.](image)
The astonishing scope of the network and the planning that went into assembling the attack cells in Europe has become apparent as we learn more about how the members made their way back to Europe and their time together as combatants in the insurgency. The cohesion of the network build on encounters and bonds formed between the men during their time with ISIS. We rarely have sufficient information to draw the networks formed in combat but occasionally social media feeds provide a glimpse. An ISIS militant known by his social media kunya, Situ-Veux Mon-Avis (“If you want my opinion”), was arrested in Turkey in July 2015 on his way back to Europe. His real name is Tyler Vilus, a French convert. Vilus was traveling to Prague, by train, on a valid Swedish passport belonging to a Bosnian man from the southern Swedish city of Malmö who had gone to Syria. From Istanbul, Vilus texted his friend in Paris that he wouldn’t make their rendezvous. The friend was Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the ground manager for the November attacks.⁷

---

The photo is from late 2013 when ISIS fighters freely posted pictures of themselves on their Facebook and Twitter feeds. It was allegedly taken in Aleppo, in a house taken over by this group of francophone fighters. Several of the men in the group came from Lunel, a small French town that became known for its outsized contribution of volunteers to the ranks of the jihadist fighter. One of the men identified is Vilus, who is sitting in the circle with his back against the wall under the window. Most of the men in the picture have been identified. The Franco-Belgian network members spoke French and pidgin jihadi-Arabic. Language remains an important segmentation line in ISIS’s ethnic melting pot. Nationality, not so much. The diversity of the Paris-Brussels attack network is astonishing. Twelve different ethno-national origins were recorded. A plurality (23%) of the network members was comprised of native-born Europeans of Moroccan descent. European native-born individuals of Algerian descent comprised 14%, 8% were White European converts, and individuals of Tunisian descent but born in Europe comprised 6%. Members of Sub-Saharan origin comprised only 3%.

The Balkans and Jihadist Travel

Fluid and networked organization will be characteristics of the next phase of the jihadist adaptation process. Well-trodden routes for illegal migration managed by people smugglers exist that link Africa and Asia to Europe, by land and sea. In the west, it goes to Spain from the country’s North African enclaves, Ceuta and Melilla. Italy can be reached by boat from Libya, and in the east Greece is accessed from small towns and beaches in Lebanon and southern Turkey. A land route to Western and Central Europe, meanwhile, goes through the Balkans. Members of the Franco-Belgian network were apprehended in Turkey, Greece, Italy, the

Balkans, Germany, and Hungary. Refugees are not terrorists, but ISIS operatives have been hiding in refugee centers and come to Europe through the routes carved out by illegal immigration. Screening procedures at airports have effectively closed airports to suspected terrorists. If the jihadist cannot travel by air, they will travel by car or by boat. The road from the Islamic State and other points in Asia to Europe often goes through the Balkans.

Three states, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, and Kosovo, feature as important gatekeeper countries. With an estimated 1,000 foreign fighters who have joined either al-Qa’ida affiliates or ISIS, the region has the highest concentration of ISIS fighters in Europe. Hundreds of Bosnian and Albanian foreign fighters have come also from diaspora communities in Western and Northern Europe. Many of the foreign fighters from Bosnia, Kosovo, or Albania have previously lived in Western Europe or have cousins living there. The infrastructure for the further expansion of a jihadist presence is in place.

Two, if not three, possible outcomes present themselves for what will happen if ISIS is thrown out of Syria and Iraq: (1) Local fighters will return to the area; while challenging, dealing with them is more of a local police matter. (2) The Balkans will be used by the terrorist networks as a place to cultivate connections with smuggling networks and a safe-zone for transiting to battleground elsewhere, particularly in Western and Northern Europe. (3) In a worst-case scenario, Bosnia and Albania may become a new jihadist battleground.

The first two options are not mutually exclusive and would become a new challenge to Europe’s security if left alone. Mergers and acquisitions between terrorist networks and the Balkan criminal networks provide the jihadists with access to lucrative illicit businesses and opportunities for the transport of operatives from Asia to Europe and back. The acquisition of criminal networks specializing in counterfeit documents, arms smuggling, and the smuggling of drugs and people is a logical adaptation to increased border controls and heightened efforts to police travel. A sensational report emerged in October 2016 that ISIS had taken over—by purchase—the Mafia’s drug production in Albania and had started to flood the United Kingdom with cannabis produced on its farms there. If accurate, ISIS entry into the Albanian drug trade is indicative of a shift to retail-level involvement in the drug trade that has not been seen previously. It follows on ISIS’s entry into other illegal crime rings: counterfeit passports, people

---


smuggling, and illegal trade in guns.\textsuperscript{14} Affiliates of al-Qa‘ida have for some time developed similar operations in North Africa fueling smuggling networks stretching from Western Africa to Northern Europe.\textsuperscript{15}

The social and political situation in the Balkan mini-states has become more hospitable to exploitation by the jihadists. Jurisdictional fragmentation combined with the presence of a significant number of extremist communities that are, for better or worse, self-policing present a special opportunity for the relocation of foreign fighters exiting the insurgency in Syria and Iraq. Reports about Burhan Seferi, a Macedonian Albanian who is wanted for ISIS-related prosecution in Macedonia but allowed sanctuary in Kosovo, are illustrative. Macedonia is ethnically Slavic and Greek Orthodox, whereas Kosovo is ethnically Albanian and Muslim.\textsuperscript{16}

In Bosnia, focus has been on the so-called \textit{paradzemats}, communities that reject the official Islamic Community in Bosnia-Herzegovina and insist on living under their own religious authorities. These so-called “black flag” villages—villages that fly the flag of jihad—are a local worry. Some are abandoned villages that have been bought up by Salafist financiers. Local newspapers reported earlier this year that 108 companies acted as intermediaries for Kuwaitis and other Arabs purchasing land for religious communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina.\textsuperscript{17} A number of prominent foreign fighters and recruiters have come from villages that have pledge allegiance to ISIS. Husayn “Bilal” Bosnic was convicted in a Bosnian court of recruiting for ISIS.\textsuperscript{18} Another notorious preacher, Nusret Imamovic, was designated an international terrorist by the US government in September 2014. He too came from a sharia-based community. Both men fought with the jihadist brigade in the Bosnian war in the early 1990s.\textsuperscript{19}


\textsuperscript{19} A well-known Kosovar-Albanian propagandist for ISIS, Lavdrim Muhaxheri, was designated an international terrorist at the same time, see http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/09/232067.htm
Recent reports of Russian meddling in Montenegro, the smallest of the small states, reinforce that these are low-capacity states made further vulnerable by their internal divisions and vulnerable to, once again, become a Gray Zone for not one but two hostile operations challenging public commitments to a shared European identity.20

The Next Five Years

The focus will shift to the redrawing of borders in the region. The jihadists’ resettlement strategy will depend, in part, on the short-term calculations of state actors in the region. Will Iran tolerate fighters traveling through the Northern corridor to Pakistan as it has for decades? Iran is at war with ISIS but not so much with al-Qa’ida. Will Turkey continue to see advantages in using jihadists as a buffer against Kurdish independence? Will the Europeans belatedly manage to set up an effective deterrence to the traffic of people smugglers across the Mediterranean Sea?

The risk is that renewed fighting among the fragile coalition of anti-ISIS forces will give way to a new civil war. The gruesome toll inflicted by ISIS’s regime on the local Muslim population in the territories it has controlled is an enormously difficult historical fact that will continue to influence policy for decades. The jihadists’ aptitude for regeneration in the midst of chaos is a known factor.

It is probable that al-Qa’ida in the end will benefit from the suppression of ISIS. The collapse of ISIS’s “state” will confirm Ayman al-Zawahiri’s assessment that al-Baghdadi’s proclamation of a new caliphate was not only premature, but also counterproductive to the forward march of the jihadist movement. Al-Qa’ida may emerge strengthened from the collapse of the Islamic State in other ways. The decision by al-Qa’ida’s affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra, to a friendly separation with al-Qa’ida in July 2016 and name change to Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (Conquest of Syria Front) puts the group in a position to soak up fighters defecting from the Islamic State and to become the major post-ISIS jihadist fighter group in the area.21

The dirty secret is that there actually aren’t that many jihadists in the world. ISIS’s fighter force has variously been estimated at 10,000, then 40,000. The Pentagon recently estimated that as many as 60,000 combatants with ISIS had been killed in military action which

puts the original estimates of the fighter force in doubt. Nonetheless, tallying the numbers, country by country, the combined jihadist force strength is probably about 100,000. Even if the size is about double that, the jihadists are not a mighty army but a cunning and ideologically cohesive terrorist movement whose leaders have figured out how to exploit globalization and local armed conflicts to challenge the contemporary state system. A focus on “crushing” ISIS at the cost of putting in place a broader vision for containing the jihadist movement and its entrenched and interconnected transnational networks will put us on track to fight the same fight under new flags again and again.

Acknowledgement

The research is based upon work funded by the US Army Research Office under grant number W911NF-15-1-0097, and, in part by, the Laboratory for Unconventional Conflict Analysis and Simulation and the Office of the Secretary of Defense with additional support from the US Army Research Laboratory, the US Army Research Office under grant number W911NF-15-1-029.

About the Author

Jytte Klausen is a Fellow at The Wilson Center in Washington, DC and the Lawrence A. Wien Professor of International Cooperation at Brandeis University and an Affiliate at the Center for European Studies at Harvard University. She is currently completing a book about the Western adherents of Bin Ladin’s al-Qa’ida and other jihadist organizations. She is the author of The Cartoons That Shook the World (Yale University Press 2009) about the worldwide protests against the Danish cartoons of the Muslim Prophet, and The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe (Oxford University Press 2005, pb. 2007). In 2006, Klausen founded the Western Jihadism Project, which studies Western violent extremists associated with al-Qa’ida.

---

The Political Economy of Terrorism in Europe: The Integration of Supply and Demand Side Approaches at City Level

Diego Muro

Introduction

Over the past decade, radicalization towards violent extremism has become a matter of great concern for the European Union (EU). The attacks in Madrid (2004), London (2005), Stockholm (2010), Paris (2015), Copenhagen (2015), Brussels (2016), Nice (2016), and Berlin (2016) have demonstrated the harm that violent extremism can cause to the social cohesion of European societies. In addition to the division between communities, the terrorist attacks have caused deaths, injuries, emotional stress, and economic costs to European Member States, not to mention a loss of public confidence in the authorities. These attacks have fueled public fears about terrorism and have pressured EU leaders to update and intensify its efforts to counter and prevent Islam-inspired violent radicalization.

This paper focuses on Salafi jihadism and examines the European response at city level. The paper uses a metaphor, the political economy of terrorism, to describe the European policies on both counterterrorism (supply-side) and prevention efforts (demand-side). The European response to date has been to integrate both 'hard' counterterrorist measures and 'soft' measures that involve prevention and counter-narratives. The integration of supply and demand side approaches at local levels is far from perfect but it is providing fruitful responses in the fight against Salafi jihadism, perhaps even a model that could be implemented in a variety of contexts experiencing the threat of homegrown terrorists and returnees.

For better or worse, European counterterrorism has proven to be path-dependent. And by path dependence I mean that where Europe is going, or is able to go, depends on where it has been. As is well known, EU member states have acquired considerable experience in combatting insurgency and terrorism since the Second World War. The old continent has had its fair share of political violence as practically all Member States of the European Union have directly experienced terrorism. In at least two cases, Spain and the UK, terrorist groups were able to sustain long-term campaigns of ethno-nationalist political violence against two advanced democracies, partly due to substantial levels of social support. To put it differently, this paper's understanding of the contemporary situation is very much affected by the historical response given in Europe to terrorism, with all its lights and shadows.
The goal of the ‘2017 Georgetown & St Andrews Conference’ where this paper was presented was to respond to the following question: ‘What does the new administration need to know about terrorism and counterterrorism?’ The security challenges facing the United States and the EU are slightly different, particularly with regards to nationals targeting their host societies, but the threat may converge in the future. The EU is mostly concerned with an estimated 7,000 European foreign fighters who have travelled to combat zones in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, some of which may return to Europe in the next few years, especially if ISIS is contained or defeated. Successful models and best practices on how to tackle terrorism at local levels are gradually emerging and may end up in blueprints of local action plans. As violent extremists continue to target urban centers, the European experience of countering terrorism and preventing radicalization at local levels may prove useful to a variety of governments worldwide.

A Political Economy Approach

A political economy approach would suggest that terrorism can be seen as an industry or firm. This is not to say that terrorism is a market, where the intersection of supply and demand curves define the point of equilibrium (or quantity of terrorism that is ‘produced’ and ‘consumed’). What is suggested here is, quite simply, that terrorist groups can be seen as agents that pursue certain objectives and function according to a normal cost–benefit logic. From this point of view, terrorist organizations have a set of tactical and strategic goals and have decided to use unlawful violence to further those goals. As any organization with limited means, terrorist groups want to devote the minimum amount of resources possible (e.g., explosives, operatives, political capital), and obtain maximum effect. In other words, the actions of terrorist groups are influenced and constrained by political and economic realities, and their decision-making is analogous to the calculations of other organizations. Ultimately, the point of using a political economy approach to study terrorism is not to condone the use of illegitimate violence (even less to justify its indiscriminate nature), but to use social science tools to fathom what often appears to be incomprehensible.

Distinguishing between the 'supply' and ‘demand’ of terrorism is another advantage of the political economy approach. Accordingly, the 'supply' of terrorists would be composed of those people who are willing to perform violent acts, the compensation of which may be either monetary or non-monetary. Terrorist groups devote considerable time to recruiting the most skillful and devoted individuals possible and do their best to weed-out uncontrollable or unpredictable individuals. According to Martha Crenshaw’s famous dictum, the primary shared
characteristic of terrorists is their normalcy. By contrast, the ‘demand’ for terrorism captures the extent to which supporters share the view that in order to bring about sociopolitical change any means are licit. In a nutshell, the political economy of terrorism would understand political violence as the result of support for terrorism (demand) as well as the presence of individuals willing to use violent methods (supply).

The idea of the political economy of terrorism is not new to the study of collective violence. Walter Enders and Todd Sandler applied economic models and statistical analyses to examine political violence in their outstanding book, *The Political Economy of Terrorism* (2006). However, their work makes extensive use of rational actor models and game-theoretic analysis to account for domestic and transnational terrorism. By contrast, this paper argues that both demand and supply factors need to be addressed in order to counter terrorism. A counter-recruitment strategy that focuses on arresting or killing individual terrorists is unlikely to succeed unless it also confronts the mechanisms that produce new waves of recruits. Similarly, a strategy of counter-radicalization that solely focuses on terrorist sympathizers while neglecting the operational aspect can only lead to disappointing results. Therefore, advanced democracies are required to fight violent extremism through a combined approach of both counter-recruitment and counter-radicalization. The next section examines whether the European efforts concentrate on the supply or demand side.

**European Counterterrorism**

The counterterrorist effort within and across the EU solely focuses on the supply side of terrorism. With regards to individual terrorists, we know who they are, where they come from, what weapons they use, their networks of friends, and so on and so forth. Understanding who joins the ranks of Jihad and who wants to create the so-called caliphate would be of great interest to European countries, given its close proximity to the Middle East. Thus, the mission of police forces and intelligence agencies across the EU is to focus on those who are willing to perform violent acts in order to counter, and whenever possible prevent, violent extremism. We clearly see, hear, and read considerably more about the supply than the demand side of terrorism.

Current research on foreign fighters, returnees, and lone wolves has provided us with some patterns worth summarizing. First of all, the ‘crime-terror nexus’ has become an essential concept to comprehend the current wave of jihadism. The relationship between criminal gangs and radicalized individuals is closer than expected and it involves both issues of funding and recruitment. In contrast with previous cases of terrorism, some of the perpetrators of the Paris or Berlin attacks, such as Salah Abdeslam or Anis Amr, were known to the police and the
intelligence services. Whereas al-Qa’ida militants were highly ideological, reports indicate that ISIS-inspired terrorists may be less so. As suggested by research carried out by Peter Neumann at King’s College London, several European terrorists were petty criminals that radicalized very quickly and saw joining ISIS as an opportunity to cleanse themselves from prior sins. Having a criminal record and a predisposition to gang-like culture has become a facilitator to join small and flexible cells.

Second, there is an association between radicalized diasporas and demographics. Whereas first generation migrants are unlikely to become terrorists, the probabilities seem to increase with second and third generation migrants, possibly due to inadequate social integration and low social mobility. The policy response here has been to build all-inclusive databases of individual suspects to identify patterns, profiles and, ultimately, understand ‘what makes terrorist tick’. True, the sharing of information at a European level can only bring benefits, but the expectation that a quantitative analysis of existing cases will provide a clear profile is clearly misplaced. The European experience of terrorism and counterterrorism since the 1960s proves that human behavior rarely resembles social science models. The number of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors working at individual level is very large and often intersects with key factors such as demography, sociocultural integration, and links to criminal milieus.

Third, both agents and spaces of radicalization have changed in the last decade. The online aspect of radicalization has grown in importance as well as the role played by exclusive cliques of friends. Whereas a decade ago, the mosque and the radical preacher may have played a central role, the prison and the local neighborhood have gained in relevance. In addition, the Internet, and especially the deep web, have also been prioritized by intelligence units, who are trying to understand how terrorists communicate, organize, and plot in the dark web. The three patterns identified above, to name a few, do not have predictive power but they indicate the importance of both offline and online elements of radicalization.

In spite of these significant advances, we do not know what makes some people join violent extremist groups in the European context. Ongoing research into causes of militancy has underlined the complexity of the motives of recruits and volunteers, as well as the differences between the various contexts. Factors contributing to violent radicalization processes can be: familial, social, gender-based, socioeconomic, psychological, religious, ideological, historical, cultural, political, propaganda, social media, or Internet-based. The events and conditions leading a person from radical ideas to violent action are also numerous, and the mechanisms are so complex that they need to be broken down to be understood. There are common factors at the global and regional levels that facilitate radicalization, but it is also clear that radicalization is very
context dependent. Regrettably, the European endeavor of identifying the causes of radicalization is so far inconclusive, hence suggesting that the effort to counter violent extremism could be complemented by a strategy of prevention.

The Prevention of Violent Extremism

The goal of this section is to deal with the demand side of terrorism or collective belief that political violence is both a necessary and legitimate tool to improve social reality. Demand for terrorism is driven by grievances (real or perceived) but also by radical milieus that provide social legitimation for unconventional means. This element of radical socialization is a necessary but not sufficient condition to account for why individuals embark on clandestine lives. For example, understanding the strength of the idea of the ‘caliphate’ as Muslim power striving for unity is as important as understanding perceptions of relative deprivation.

Within the European context, efforts to deal with the demand side of terrorism have been driven by the concept of ‘radicalization’. Violent radicalization has gradually moved to the top of the EU counterterrorism agenda but, regrettably, it has been accompanied by a relatively embryonic understanding of the processes and interplay of factors that contribute to the adoption of radical ideas and/or behavior. The term ‘radicalization’ was brought into the policy discussion after the coordinated suicide bombing attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005) and, in spite of its lack of precision, it continued to be used in the aftermath of attacks in Europe: Stockholm (2010), Paris (2015), and Brussels (2016). About the only thing radicalization experts agree on is that radicalization is a process.

Within the EU, the demand-side approach has mainly focused on the prevention of radicalization and, to a lesser extent, on the possibility of producing counter-narratives. Efforts have focused on developing programs in schools, prisons, and neighborhoods that could prevent the adoption of radical ideas and methods. The so-called war of ideas has received less attention, and the European experience is particularly important here. With regards to the campaigns of both ETA and IRA, it was only when states made an effort to understand the underlying ideas and mobilizing narratives of these underground groups that they were able to fine-tune the counterterrorist effort in areas such as security sector reform or penitentiary policy. In the current context, European elites need to think long and hard about the integration of minorities (e.g., banlieues) as well as the current refugee crisis.

The demand side of terrorism also requires a targeted approach that directly tackles hotbeds of radicalization. Government-led campaigns that are broadcasted indiscriminately are ineffective, partly because the state is not a credible agent in the eyes of radicalized audiences, but
also because radicalization is context dependent and immune to a one-size-fits-all policy. Too often, government campaigns are a caricature and present a zero-sum game between laicism and religion. There is an urgent need to incorporate credible actors (e.g., local leaders, activists, teachers, doctors) who can provide targeted responses from the bottom-up (as opposed to top-down government approaches). The state response needs of the societal response to regain prestige and counter radicalization.

Police agencies are told to focus on ‘signs’ of radicalization such as growing a beard, traveling to far-off conflict zones, becoming very discreet, or stopping use of a telephone (which may suggest that an attack is not far off). Given the enormous difficulty of preventing an attack, the reaction of security agencies has been to demand increasing coordination across the EU. Police and intelligence agencies have argued that they have insufficient resources to counter a complex phenomenon that does not only affect the security realm. However, it may be possible to combine both counterterrorism and preventive strategies.

Can counterterrorism and prevention efforts be integrated?

There is an incipient movement at local levels towards combining counterterrorist and preventive strategies in an integrated strategy. The European push for this development is coming from a variety of cities (e.g., Aarhus, Mechelen, Granada) as well as the EU network of experts known as the Radicalization Awareness Network Centre of Excellence (RAN CoE). Whereas the number of best practices and positive examples is clearly limited, there are sustained efforts to come up with action plans that may be applied to a variety of local contexts. The theoretical basis for these city blueprints is that radicalization is a complex issue and that counter-radicalization needs to be as well. This approach assumes that it is necessary to develop a better understanding of the local causes and processes that may lead to innovative, ethical solutions to counter violent actions taken by radicalized male or female individuals at a city level. These may include policies for preventing violent extremism such as counter-communications disseminated online (e.g., YouTube, special forums, Twitter) or offline (e.g., in the classroom or in one-to-one interventions). It is also clear that preventing violent radicalization is also about winning hearts and minds and countering extremist propaganda whilst preserving the fundamentals rights of the citizens.

The main characteristics of the city initiatives that try to combine supply and demand approaches of terrorism in a coherent strategy at a local level can be summarized in four points. First, effective local initiatives are multi-stakeholder. Mechanisms of coordination within the city facilitate discussion and concerted action between agents devoted to security, education, health,
social services, but also communities and civil society at large. The basis for the prevention of radicalization is that cities need to provide inclusive spaces where local actors (both public and private) can interact, discuss openly and work collectively towards devising effective measures to counter violent extremism. Prevention strategies at the local level need the participation of multiple agencies (e.g., government, judiciary, social services, schools, local police) as well as the collaboration of civil society organizations and the citizenry at large, who need to be empowered to influence decision-making.

Second, effective local initiatives require both vertical and horizontal coordination. In other words, resilient cities can be built when a variety of stakeholders are involved in prevention strategies and there is both vertical coordination (between the different levels of the state administration) and horizontal coordination (between local stakeholders). According to local activists, one of the priorities is to avoid the concerns raised by the PREVENT strategy in the UK, including the lack of a precise definition of extremism, the potential for religious discrimination and for being based on a false premise of an ‘escalator’ model in which there is a progression from holding conservative religious ideals to violent extremism. In addition, the UK government’s counter-extremism strategy has also been criticized for stigmatizing Muslim society and for securitizing diaspora communities and immigration.

Third, local initiatives overcome the false dilemma between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ approaches. Cities and town are creating institutionalized mechanisms to facilitate the participation and coordination of local actors and stakeholders and to promote a shift from ‘hard’ police-based approaches and strategies to multi-actor strategies that incorporate ‘soft’ approaches that are ultimately designed to win the hearts and minds of radicalizing or radicalized individuals by employing non-coercive methods. As argued above, an emphasis on the local level does not exclude the participation of higher levels of the state administration and allows the development of tailored initiatives that engage with a wide series of local actors, hence reducing the weight put on security forces and intelligence agencies. Needless to say, preventing and countering radicalization must engage the whole of society and requires a multidisciplinary approach that overcomes the false dilemma between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ approaches. A balanced and comprehensive approach towards countering violent extremism must feature the two.

Fourth, the local initiatives are based on the principle of subsidiarity, which sustains that social and political issues should be dealt with at the most immediate (or local) level that is consistent with their resolution. Research and practice in the area of counter-radicalization have increasingly shown that subsidiarity should drive the focus of prevention policies. At the international level, it is worth highlighting the UN-sponsored project on the prevention of
radicalization in major cities which aims to create a global network of mayors, municipal-level policymakers, and practitioners united in building social cohesion and community resilience to counter violent extremism in all its forms.1

Conclusion

Around 75 percent of the EU population lives in cities, and there is a clear need to make these urban environments safer and to protect the prosperity, political stability, and well being that European citizens enjoy. As jihadist terrorist cells continue to target medium and large cities, there is an increasing need for civil society organizations and local actors to remain vigilant. After all, most of the individuals that established these terrorist cells lived in these cities and moved with ease within their host societies (and between cities). Very often, they were members of the communities or they mixed with the local population and blended into some neighborhoods and communities. Furthermore, criminal dynamics at a local level became catalysts of radicalization and had a direct impact on the acquisition of radical attitudes and behaviors by individuals who then perpetrated urban violence against innocent civilians.

An effective response to Salafi jihadism requires an understanding of why individuals become militants as well as an appreciation of why sympathizers and supporters of the terrorist organization share the view that political violence is necessary. Counterterrorism mainly focuses on arresting terrorist individuals (supply side) but a comprehensive strategy of counter-recruitment needs to tackle the reasons why the radical message resonates (demand side). In short, individuals radicalize toward violent extremism because of individual processes (micro level) but also for organizational reasons (meso level) as well as societal and systemic reasons (macro level). EU Member States are best equipped to tackle the current threat of Salafi jihadists by adopting a multi-level approach dealing with both demand and supply factors.

The political economy approach suggested above has policy implications at the international and domestic level. With regard to foreign policy, the containment and defeat of ISIS is fundamental to European security. The EU is not facing an existential threat but a serious security issue of domestic and international ramifications. Policing is mostly concerned with foreign fighters, returnees, and lone-wolf actors but the international conflicts in the MENA region are an intrinsic part of this security challenge. The group known as ISIS (also known as Daesh, ISIL, and Islamic State) has taken advantage of areas with limited state governance such as Libya, Syria, and Iraq and uses these territories to conceive, plan, and direct attacks. The territorial control of ISIS has direct consequences for the security of Europe, as

1 See http://strongcitiesnetwork.org/ for more information.
foreign volunteers continue to be trained in military camps, and it is expected that some of these foreign fighters will eventually return to Europe. The consolidation of the so-called caliphate as a proto-state is a direct threat to European security.

At the domestic level, the integration of counterterrorist and preventive strategies can be carried out by cities, which have become the main targets of new jihadism. Measures to increase security originate at the national level but are often deployed at lower administrative levels such as cities. Urban centers are in the front line of the fight against radicalization because they often suffer violent extremism in their streets and neighborhoods. It is in European cities where transnational extremist threats take shape in the forms of hate speech, recruitment networks, radical cells, and terrorist attacks, and it is also in European cities where prevention mechanisms need to be devised. In short, cities are the obvious settings in which to implement the motto ‘think globally and act locally’.

About the Author

Diego Muro is a political scientist specializing in terrorism, ethno-nationalist conflict, and secession. He joined the Centre for the Study of Political Violence and Terrorism (CSTPV) at the University of St Andrews in 2016 and previously held permanent posts at King’s College London (2003-2009) and at the Pompeu Fabra University (2009-2016). He was also Senior Fellow at the University of Oxford (St Antony’s College) and Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute (EUI). He is the author of two volumes on the Basque terrorist group ETA: Ethnicity and Violence (2008) and From Bullets to Ballots (2016); he is currently working on another book on the effectiveness of terrorism. For more information, please visit: http://www.diegomuro.com/
Jihadist Mobilization, Undemocratic Salafism, and Terrorist Threat in the European Union

Fernando Reinares

The most recent jihadist mobilization observed since 2012 across countries belonging to the European Union (EU) is related to the ongoing like-minded insurgencies in Syria and in Iraq. However, the levels of this jihadist mobilization, from all accounts in a receding sequence throughout last year, reached unprecedented peaks inside the EU. Since the formation of al-Qa’ida in 1988 and the subsequent development of global jihadism as a worldwide movement, no other jihadist mobilizations—in connection, for example, to conflicts such as those which took place in Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq between 2003 and 2007, Somalia, or northern Mali—raised to similar heights within the EU.

In order to explore and understand both the extent and scope of this most recent jihadist mobilization affecting EU nations, it seems reasonable to rely on data about foreign terrorist fighters as a good indicator. It has been empirically established, precisely with respect to previous jihadist mobilizations, that individuals who radicalize as jihadist in the West are more likely than not to leave or try to leave the West to fight somewhere else.¹ This trend has been explained as resulting from factors such as opportunity to easily travel to fight abroad for a longer period, availability of training to increase operational capabilities, and norms according to which foreign fighting is perceived as more legitimate.

Muslims—including in this term not only mindful followers of Islam but persons having a Muslim cultural background—from EU nations account for around one-fifth of the 27,000 to 31,000 individuals who, from 2012 to the end of 2015, had traveled to join jihadist organizations in Syria and Iraq.² They went to primarily join the so-called Islamic State—between April 2013 and June 2014 known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIL)—but also the al-Qa’ida branch based in the former of these two countries, and other smaller entities also active in the area. However, no more than 20 million Muslims were living in EU countries, which means these are approximately 16 times overrepresented among the foreign terrorist fighters present in Syria and Iraq when compared to figures for Muslims traveling from other regions of the world.

Against the background of all these developments, the purpose of these remarks is, first of all, to reflect on differences in the levels of the most recent jihadist mobilization that can be observed between EU nations. Secondly, it aims at dealing with a factor usually forgotten when discussing the why Western European governments have problems to accommodate many among the descendants of immigrant Muslims. Finally, the essay discusses how jihadist organizations based abroad can exploit both favorable conditions for recruitment within certain Muslim congregations and a religious cleavage inside EU countries.

Towards a Differential Analysis

The unprecedented jihadist mobilization in the EU hasn’t plagued all member nations uniformly, a rather overlooked reality. Contrary to what is often taken for granted, the EU countries more seriously affected by this most recent jihadist radicalization are neither necessarily defined by having the largest numbers of Muslim inhabitants nor by having the highest percentages of Muslims as part of their total national populations. Leaving aside the case of Cyprus, because of the exceptional circumstances concurring in this divided island, Bulgaria is next among EU countries with respect to the highest percentage of Muslims as part of the total population. However, very few Bulgarians are known to have traveled to Syria and Iraq as foreign terrorist fighters.

On the other hand, Italy and Spain rank in the top five among the EU states with larger Muslim populations living inside their territories. However, figures for the number of nationals or residents in these two countries that departed to become foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, as well as for their proportion with respect to their corresponding national populations in general and the Muslim populations in particular, are rather low. Therefore, if countries affected in a particularly serious manner by the most recent jihadist mobilization taking place across the EU are not necessarily those where Muslims register highest proportions with respect to the national populations nor of necessity those which concentrate more Muslim people, which ones are they?

The EU countries more seriously affected by this wave of jihadist mobilization surely include large nations with indeed large Muslim populations, such as France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, but also smaller nations with relatively high proportions of Muslims as part of

---

their populations, as in the cases of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, or Sweden. As opposed to the centuries-old Muslim population of Bulgaria or the first-generation immigrants that predominate among Muslims in both Italy and Spain, the common unifier for those other eight mentioned countries is the fact that they all have Muslim populations composed mainly of second-generations, descendants of immigrants who left their Muslim-majority homelands in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia decades ago.

A generalized identity crisis among young, second-generation descendants of immigrant Muslims in Western Europe’s wealthiest countries appears then to lie behind the most recent unprecedented jihadist mobilization. Migrant descendants born or socialized in an EU country are often caught in an odd balance between cultures and are especially prone to identity crises connected with a diaspora situation. Too many of them have developed little, if any, affection for the EU nation in which they were born or raised, even though they show scant attachment to the nation from which their parents or grandparents originate. Jihadist propaganda offers an extreme, violent solution to these people’s identity conflicts, luring them with a different concept of nation: the nation of Islam as promoted by Islamic State but also al-Qa’ida.

Policy Failure, but Also Salafism

What the figures on foreign terrorist fighters suggest is that the EU countries in general and Western European governments in particular have a serious problem in accommodating a more than significant portion of second-generation Muslims amidst their heterogeneous and pluralistic societies. Their institutions and civil society entities are failing to persuade thousands of young second-generation Muslims—irrespective of their socioeconomic and educational background, which is no key to predict the appeal of jihadist attitudes and beliefs—that their religious identity is compatible with their identity—or multiple identities—as citizens of liberal democracies. Neither a multiculturalist approach, such as the one long pursued in United Kingdom, nor the pervasive assimilationist policies adopted by France, has succeeded.

But flawed institutional policies and inadequate performance of civil society entities are not alone to be eventually blamed for the lack of accommodation experienced by considerable segments of second-generation Muslims in EU countries. Inside the Muslim collectivities themselves, dynamics towards self-marginalization and self-exclusion from mainstream open societies exist. These dynamics advocating segregation result mainly, though not only, from the doctrinal and organizational efforts of Salafist religious leaders and congregations. Efforts often transmitted by means of places of worship and in households, attracting many among young
second-generation Muslims born or raised in Western European countries but suffering from identity conflicts and in quest of meaning or structure in their lives.

While, in its traditional version, Salafism presents itself as a quietist orthodox brand of Islam, respectful to the established authority, it is also a fundamentalist and politicized religiously-based ideology. Actually, Salafism as a rigorist understanding of the Quran and the Hadith leads its followers to believe that liberal democracy is *haram* or prohibited from an Islamic perspective, that there is an intrinsic incompatibility between Islam and democracy, and that Muslims living in majority non-Muslim countries should actually resist social integration and behave in such a way as to drastically restrict and regulate, particularly but not solely when it comes to women of their own closed communities, interaction with the rejected surrounding society—presented in typically antagonistic terms as a secularized and impure infidel environment—in order to avoid corruptive influences and thus affirm what they claim to be the true faith of the Prophet Muhammad and the pious predecessors.\(^4\)

This all implies a very serious middle to long-term challenge to the basic social cohesion constitutive of Western European nations, added to other socio-political antagonisms. Not only because Salafist congregations and organizations established in EU nations purposefully reach out to Muslim immigrants or Muslim immigrant descendants whose original Northern African or Middle Eastern religious tradition derives from a distinct, far more adaptable, and tolerant understanding of Islam. Also because they are comparatively more efficient in incorporating individuals to their associations due to, among other advantages, financial support from transnational Salafist networks and ultimately from affluent public authorities and private donors located in countries of the Arabian Peninsula where, Saudi Arabia being the unavoidable reference, Salafism is the exclusive religious confession.

**What the Terrorist Can Then Do**

Salafism continues to grow influential among Muslims in the EU and, despite the many different interpretations of Islam existing among them, has taken a central role in conditioning how Muslims deal with their religious traditions in Western societies. This has sometimes been the unexpected or uncalculated consequence of poorly-informed decisions, eventually adopted on the spur of the moment and often in the context of broad religious policies or radicalization prevention programs, from the local level of government to the national one and including

intermediate provincial and regional authorities. Probably out of ignorance, EU politicians and policymakers, when confronted with the problem of jihadist mobilization, seem to be rather prone to think about peaceful Salafists—because they present themselves as peaceful, disregarding their fundamentalist credentials—as the best partners against violent Salafists.

A first implicit risk in this kind of partnership is that of empowering those who preach the incompatibility between Islam and democracy at the obvious expense of moderate Muslims who, also part of our own societies but loyal to our institutions as a result of conviction and not of convenience, think the opposite in this respect. This would amount to facilitating the growth of Salafism among Muslims living in Western European nations, moving people away from ordinary social life to deliberately segregated collectivities with patterns of behavior contradictory to those common in open societies. As a consequence, Muslims as a whole might be perceived with increasing distrust by non-Muslims, potentially widening an already emerging religious cleavage, as unfavorable views of Muslims appear to be on the rise in main EU countries.\(^5\)

The more Salafism as a fundamentalist version of Islam, as well as the inward-looking Salafist congregations, become attractive to identity-seeking and disenfranchised second-generations Muslims in EU countries, the more jihadist organizations based abroad will find it easier to recruit young individuals, willing to transit from orthodox quietism to jihadist terrorism, by focusing on potential recruits already familiar with Salafist tenets and using Salafist entities as gateways. Also, terrorists acting under the attitudes and beliefs promoted by the bellicose strand of Salafism, that is to say by Salafist-jihadism or plainly stated jihadism, can exploit and widen the social fracture between Muslims and non-Muslim in EU countries alluded to in the previous paragraph.

Indeed, they now do so every single time a jihadist attack is successfully perpetrated on Western European soil and it could even be said that as long as jihadist terrorism remains a credible threat for Europeans, even if perceived differently depending on the country.\(^6\) This threat can currently manifest itself, as is well known, throughout a variety of possible expressions, ranging from terrorist attacks carried out by lone actors or solely inspired cells to acts of terrorism

---


prepared and executed by small groups of individuals having some kind of connection with jihadist organizations based abroad or acting on a more complex and centralized mission planned by Islamic State or al-Qa’ida senior leadership. Each time a terrorist attack is conducted, jihadism is to be thought of not just as a national security problem, but also as a challenge to the fabric of open societies.

Addressing the US Administration

Though an EU strategy for combating radicalization and recruitment to terrorism exists and several EU member states have effectively implemented national programs, the unprecedented most recent jihadist mobilization evidences the insufficiency or outright failure of these efforts. Well over a decade after the bombings of 2004 in Madrid and those in London in 2005, in the wake of the attacks of 2015 in Paris and 2016 in Brussels, EU citizens are still demanding urgent measures to deal with terrorist radicalization and recruitment. Measures of their preferential requests have to do with the fight against social exclusion and poverty, the fight against radical websites, the removal of illegal contents from the Internet and online social media, communication campaigns to raise awareness among the youngest and the most vulnerable about the risks of radicalization, and the promotion of dialogue between different cultures and religion.

Interestingly for the US administration, the absolute numbers and proportions of Muslim youth who left the United States since 2012, with the aim to become foreign terrorist fighters in Syria and Iraq, resemble much more those found for Italy and Spain than those corresponding to France, Germany, United Kingdom, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, or Sweden. They are more similar, in other words, to those of EU countries where the most recent jihadist mobilization as such proved to be less severe that to those far more seriously affected by the same extremism phenomenon. But this should come as no surprise, as first-generation immigrants

---

and, to a lesser extent, converts—but not second-generation descendants of Muslim immigrants—still predominate among Muslims in America.⁹

Despite foreign terrorist fighter figures of individuals who departed from the United States, despite the number of arrestees in the United States for activities related to the Islamic State or al-Qa’ida as the most recent jihadist mobilization initiated worldwide unfolded, and despite the terrorist incidents which occurred on the US mainland throughout the past five years—in particular, lethal attacks such as those in Boston in 2012, Chattanooga and San Bernardino in 2015, and Orlando in 2016—the US administration remains in a relatively advantageous position to face the jihadist mobilization and threat. It can work ahead, extracting lessons from its own experience but also assessing the experience of EU member states, on addressing factors that make second-generation Muslims especially vulnerable to jihadist radicalization and open societies less resilient to violent extremism.

About the Author

Fernando Reinares is Director of the Program on Global Terrorism at Elcano Royal Institute as well as Professor of Political Science and Security Studies at Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, both in Madrid. A Wilson Center Global Fellow, he is also Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University and American University in Washington, DC. Reinares is also a Contributing Editor of Studies in Conflict and Terrorism. His most recent books include Al Qaeda’s Revenge: The 2004 Madrid Train Bombings (Washington, DC and New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Columbia University Press, 2016). Estado Islámico en España [Islamic State in Spain, with Carola García-Calvo] (Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, 2016), and, edited jointly with Bruce Hoffman, The Evolution of the Global Terrorism Threat (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

Introduction

The counterterrorist challenges faced by each new US administration are unique. But reflection on the long history of terrorism and counterterrorism might yield some valuable elements of an effective approach, and this article humbly proposes five such lines of thinking in relation to the Donald Trump Presidency. Central to the argument is the crucial reality that terrorism and counterterrorism exist in a mutually shaping relationship, and that it has been state responses to terrorism that have most shaped historical change, rather than the acts of non-state terrorists themselves. Put another way, much of what develops across world politics and international relations over coming years will be determined by the choices that President Trump and those around him take in response to the challenge of terrorism.

1. What the Administration will have to deal with is terrorisms, rather than terrorism.

This is a vital point, and it must be borne in mind in relation to all counterterrorist decisions and policies during the Trump Administration’s time in office. In the wake of the 9/11 atrocity, there was an understandable urge to do something about terrorism as such. But the dynamics of terrorism, and of effective counterterrorism, always rely ultimately on recognizing what is unique about each terrorist organization, cause, or threat that is faced. There are many diverse terrorist groups and actors across the globe, of course. But even if one considers jihadist terrorism (the most high-profile challenge in the terrorist arena as far as President Trump is likely to be concerned), it is very much terrorisms rather than terrorism that he will need to address. Jihadists in ISIS differ in significant ways from those in the enduring world of al-Qa’ida; ISIS in Syria represents different levels of difficulty from ISIS within Iraq; lone actors in the West who identify with ISIS operate according to frequently different dynamics again (lone-actor violence often involving very different origins and processes from group-based terrorism).

Much current commentary unhelpfully conflates what are ultimately different terrorisms. To protect Americans against lone-actor threats involves understanding the precise world of

---

operation (and effective counter-operation) that the evidence suggests to be necessary in relation to such terrorists; limiting ISIS's effectiveness in Syria is a different matter, requiring different strategies and understanding. This has implications for the use of specialist expertise. Often, what is required is not so much terrorist experts, but rather terrorist expertise combined with deep regional wisdom and knowledge as offered in policy-friendly analysis. I have yet to meet, for example, a first-class historian of Iraq who thought that what had been promised about the likely effects of 2003 regime change in that country was even faintly plausible. Had such voices been seriously heeded at the time, and the post-invasion fiasco been avoided, then we would not now be facing ISIS. In order not to worsen the situation regarding terrorism over coming years, President Trump must listen carefully to those various kinds of expert who know in detail about the different forms of terrorism with which he has to deal, and about the different historical contexts within which they have each emerged.

2. The Administration must be realistic (internally, as well as publicly) about what might reasonably be expected to be achieved in the field of counterterrorism.

I have been influenced recently by the work of UCLA’s Steven Spiegel and his colleagues regarding the United States’ efforts to bring peace to the Middle East. This scholarship demonstrates how incredibly difficult it is to make serious progress in reducing terrorist violence even in what has been a high-priority area of counterterrorist regional policy for the United States. Many other cases reinforce the point. The Northern Ireland Peace Process (one of the most successful endeavors to reduce terrorist violence) is a process which has now gone on as long as did the conflict to which it brought something like an end; and even here, at time of writing, the political process so generated is faltering, and terrorist violence (albeit at a much reduced level) still persists.

This insight has implications for Syria and Iraq, which will clearly preoccupy the president significantly and which have far larger global implications than Northern Ireland. But it is also important for dealings with Israel/Palestine, with Colombia, and with the various terrorist challenges faced by Russia and China and on which the Trump regime will need to have a stance.

---

6 See, for example, the much-publicized resignation letter from the then Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, Martin McGuinness, of January 9, 2017, which precipitated the collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive.
I have argued elsewhere that one of the implications of a close reading of the long history of terrorism is that we must learn to live with it rather than pretend that we can eradicate it entirely.\textsuperscript{7} To exaggerate what can be achieved merely gives gifts to one’s terrorist opponents, who can then present their continued existence and operation as, in themselves, a kind of victory. For all of the seeming demands for public rhetoric, I still think that President Trump’s Inaugural Speech declaration—’we will eradicate [radical Islamic terrorism] completely from the face of the earth’ (January 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2017)—sets the bar of expectation far too high. One of the areas of success open to terrorists is the maintenance of resistance in the face of state hostility.\textsuperscript{8} To state publicly that you are going to achieve things in counterterrorism that are simply not achievable gives another gift to your terrorist adversaries. This should be avoided.

Likewise, there should emerge as far as possible a realistic set of expectations among the US public about what can and cannot be achieved. Not every terrorist attack can be prevented, and people should recognize this, just as they can be reassured that their likelihood of being a victim of such an attack is incredibly small in practice.

In all of this, it is again vital to remember that it is the relationship between terrorism and counterterrorism which most changes history. Every major decision by a state, and every claim about what a state will do in relation to terrorism, will affect the shape of the terrorism that it faces. In the case of the post-9/11 decision to engage in Iraq, and to justify this partly in relation to the terrorist threat, the outcomes have been far from entirely benign. Strikingly, the then senior CIA man who lastingly interrogated Saddam Hussein after his capture, makes the depressing observation that, “The rise of Islamic extremism in Iraq, chiefly under the rubric of ISIS (or Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham), is a catastrophe that the United States needn’t have faced had it been willing to live with an aging and disengaged Saddam Hussein.”\textsuperscript{9}

Part of the problem here arose from overconfidence in regard to what could be done to reshape the world after the 9/11 attacks, and an exaggerated expectation of what it was feasible to achieve. In regard to what is now faced in relation to ISIS, there must be recognition about how little will be achievable purely through military means, and also about how lengthy a problem ISIS and its Syrian and Iraqi setting are likely to prove.

3. The Administration must be coordinated and unified in its counterterrorism, both within the US state, and in terms of its external alliances.

Effective coordination is a central element in successful counterterrorism. It is also depressingly difficult to achieve. Different wings of the same state find it understandably hard enough to liaise smoothly with one another, while dealings between states are more complex and awkward still. In Europe, efforts to ensure that the European Union works as a unified counterterrorist actor made progress after 9/11 and amid ensuing dangers; but they also came up against the repeated pattern of national attitudes, structures, and approaches getting in the way of effective coordination. The challenges faced here are hardly likely to ease in the wake of the UK’s departure from the European Union. For the Trump Administration, the difficulty of ensuring coordination between police forces, agencies, and other US state actors represents an inherited challenge of serious proportions (not least given the tense relationship that initially existed between the incoming president and the US Intelligence Community). But where counterterrorist efforts in the past century have been most successful, one element has been the establishing of unity of action and purpose and cooperation between different wings of the state in question. Moreover, positive relationships with key allies internationally should be a priority. This will include consideration of Middle Eastern players (Israel, obviously, but also Jordan in a decisive manner too); it will also include the patient pursuit of strong relations with key European allies, and the avoidance of negative blowback regarding terrorism when the US engages with Russia and China.

4. The Administration must communicate a sustainedly credible series of messages about terrorism.

Credibility derives both from the content of the message, and from the perceptions people have regarding the person delivering the message to them. President Trump enjoys great credibility with sections of the United States population not always sympathetic to Washingtonians. This is a great resource. He has famous difficulties in regard to credibility with many others in the country, and internationally he has yet to establish himself as a figure whose pronouncements on major issues carry enough high seriousness.

The long history of terrorism provides many examples of states damaging and undermining themselves through making incredible claims. States frequently depict terrorist

---

11 W. Matchett, Secret Victory: The Intelligence War that Beat the IRA (Lisburn: Hiskey Ltd, 2016).
adversaries as being devoid of political support, as being motivated by mere criminality, as being characterized by mental illness, as being short of political purpose, when much of the time these diagnoses are demonstrably false. Every time the Trump Administration delivers a public statement on terrorism, and every time it endeavors to develop a policy regarding terrorism, it should consider the various audiences that are involved. If what is said or planned would seem implausible to potential recruits from the terrorists’ constituency, or could be falsified by the terrorists themselves, then the Administration will have done itself considerable harm. The fact that most terrorist organizations rely on sane people with some measure of political commitment does not in any way legitimate those groups’ murderous violence. But to deny these realities—whether dealing with jihadists or with other kinds of terrorist actors—makes counterterrorism more difficult rather than easier.

One particular area of importance for the Trump regime will be the relationship between Islam and terrorism. It has been too tempting for some politicians and commentators in the twenty-first century to present casually the connection between Islam and terrorist violence. In truth, the relationship is complex. While many Muslim terrorists do find at least part of their motivation and justification in the realm of religious belief, it is also true that the vast majority of the world's Muslims have no sympathy for jihadist terrorism, that relations between Islam and the major non-Muslim communities in the world has been and remains benign,12 and that where there is a connection between Islam and terrorism it normally concerns very particular sub-sets of Islamic belief and practice. Here, the dynamics might indeed be important to recognize, whether one judges this to involve the particular lethality of certain kinds of religious cults due to their capacity to weed out shirkers and defectors,13 or the possible elements of certain forms of Islam as they appeal to certain kinds of personality types.14

But such arguments are some distance from any crass suggestion of an automatic or inevitable causal relationship between Islamic faith and terrorism. And any statements from the president or those around him that concern religion and terrorism must be credible, and must acknowledge (for example) that the vast majority of the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims utterly despise jihadist terrorism. To take a different approach will be to lose credibility across much of the Muslim world (which could be disastrous) and indeed to worsen the disaffection that exists against the United States.

Moreover, adhering to evidence-based, credible, and calm assessments of terrorism can still allow for confidence that one’s arguments against terrorists will prove damaging to the latter. Indeed, close scrutiny of the arguments and politics of terrorists over many decades suggests that states’ own arguments, patiently and calmly articulated, can indeed tend to undermine their terrorist opponents as long as the state adheres to credible interpretations and analyses. To offer arguments that lack credibility and which can be falsified—whether in terms of the nature of terrorism itself, its causes, or the prospects for defeating it—would do more harm to President Trump than to his violent opponents.

5. The Administration must maintain an appropriate sense of the true scale of the threat, and therefore adopt a proportional level of response.

One of the most striking aspects of terrorism is that it seizes attention on a far greater scale than it actually does damage in practice. This point has been emphasized repeatedly in the scholarly literature: ‘although the yearly chance an American will be killed by a terrorist within the country is about one in 4 million under present conditions, around 40 percent of Americans have professed, in polls taken since late 2001, that they worry they or a family member will become a victim of a terrorist’. A broader point about the degree of threat to the United States as such is equally vital: ‘The actual danger of the new international terrorist networks to the regimes of stable states in the developed world...remains negligible’.

This is not to deny the possibility that a larger-scale threat might emerge in the future from non-state terrorist sources, and of course the Trump Administration must assess that threat carefully and responsibly. The point, however, is that as things stand, the threat of terrorism to the United States is far, far less great than, say, the threat from climate change. Moreover, to exaggerate the degree of terrorist threat can provide the basis for those unhelpful overreactions that (from France to the United Kingdom to Israel to the United States itself) have so often made terrorists’ causes easier to sustain throughout modern history. Revenge for violence against one’s community has repeatedly been a key motivation for terrorists and a crucial means of their recruiting activists. Military and other forms of state over-reaction (including the ill-judged use of torture against terrorist suspects) have repeatedly made such revenge easier for terrorists to deploy in their campaigns against Western and other states. So the Trump Administration must

---

15 English, *Does Terrorism Work?*
resist the temptation to exaggerate the threat, and it must avoid overreaction and an overreliance on military methods of countering terrorism.

Conclusion

I am fully aware how different are the challenges involved, respectively, in running a major country and in merely offering academic analysis such as that which is included in this article. Moreover, I have no expectation that policymakers in Washington will attend closely to what a mere university professor says on this subject. But the importance of some form of such reflection about the history of terrorism seems to me unarguable. To approach any major policy challenge without deep reflection on the long inheritance that a new president encounters in that field would make their job more difficult. Here, I am making five main points.

• What the Administration will have to deal with is *terrorisms*, rather than terrorism.
• The Administration must be realistic (internally, as well as publicly) about what might reasonably be expected to be achieved in the field of counterterrorism.
• The Administration must be coordinated and unified in its counterterrorism, both within the US state, and in terms of its external alliances.
• The Administration must communicate a sustainedly credible series of messages about terrorism.
• The Administration must maintain an appropriate sense of the true scale of the threat, and therefore adopt a proportional level of response.

No counterterrorist policy will save every life. But the long history of terrorism and counterterrorism seems to me to suggest that adherence to the above five principles would enable President Trump to protect many lives and limbs from terrorism during his time in office.

About the Author

Richard English is Professor of Politics at Queen’s University Belfast, where he is also Distinguished Professorial Fellow in the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security, and Justice. From 2011–2016 he was Director of the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews. His books have won numerous awards and include Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA (2003), Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in Ireland (2006)
and Does Terrorism Work? A History (2016). He is a Fellow of the British Academy, a Member of the Royal Irish Academy, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, an Honorary Fellow of Keble College Oxford, and an Honorary Professor at the University of St Andrews.
Law, Counterterrorism, and Intelligence Gathering: Recommendations for the Trump Administration

Elizabeth Grimm Arsenault

I had originally planned to focus my comments just on some reflections on the challenges of fighting terrorism in the years to come, on the difference of perception versus reality in how few Americans have actually been killed since 9/11 in jihadist attacks domestically (in fact, you are more likely to be killed in the United States by an armed toddler than a terrorist), and some recommendations for how intelligence practitioners can best convey the value of their work in this new Administration.

But then Wednesday happened.

I don’t know about you all, but I have found it difficult to simply keep pace with press conferences, speeches, and executive orders of the past week. I have found that it is in fact essential to take all of Donald Trump’s campaign promises literally. When The Washington Post¹ and The New York Times² revealed a draft Executive Order that calls for a policy review that could authorize the CIA to reopen “black site” prisons overseas and potentially restart an interrogation program that was dismantled in 2009, I knew that I needed to shift the focus of my comments.

So, I would like to open with three broad harms that I see emerging from a dysfunctional relationship between the commander-in-chief and those charged with narrowing his windows of uncertainty about national security issues before addressing specifically what I see as a dangerous national security decision at the intersection of intelligence gathering and counterterrorism: the possible reopening of the black sites and a possible return to coercive practices.

I would describe President Trump’s views toward intelligence and the Intelligence Community (IC) as at best dismissive and at worst denigrating and combative. From his transition team mocking the IC for getting it wrong on Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, to disputing conclusions about Russian hacking, to his disinterest in the President’s Daily Brief (PDB), to even his initial choice of General Michael Flynn as his national security advisor, a man who accused the Agency of being a political tool of the Administration, to his weekend speech in

front of the Memorial Wall, Trump’s election has posed particular concerns about his national security leadership.

He is certainly not the first policymaker to be dismissive or even the first to be suspicious about intelligence. The ideal relationship between intelligence and policy is symbiotic: policymakers communicate their areas of priority to the IC and subsequently rely on the community for advice.

However, the IC and policymakers exist in a power imbalance. Presidents can function without IC. The IC, however, cannot function without the president. He or she is customer number one for them. Intelligence activities depend on having a customer to serve. But certainly policymakers enter office with their own worldviews, ideologies, cognitive biases, as well as friends and advisors who provide them information. So, while others have shared this suspicion of intelligence and the community—Nixon also did not take PDBs during his transition and believed that the CIA conspired against him in 1960—I believe this depth of hostility is unusual.

To that end, I see three broad harms emerging from this hostility: politicization, neglect, and erosion of public faith. The first two I believe are short-term harms and the last one is a longer-term issue.

Danger #1: Politicization. This is not a new problem. Politicization refers to “the deliberate distortion of analysis or distortion of judgment to favor a preferred line of thinking irrespective of evidence.” Many people think this manifests as direct orders to tailor intelligence to policy, but it is more often much more subtle: policymakers sending repeated tacit signals about what they expect to hear. In a recent *Washington Post* piece, General Hayden (former director of the National Security Agency and Central Intelligence Agency) warned against this possibility. It skews analysis in the short term and in the longer term contributes to mutual mistrust.

Danger #2: Neglect. If we take Trump literally—which as I said earlier, I think we need to—it appears that this danger is also likely: simply ignoring IC products. On one hand, neglect removes from policy deliberations an important source of evidence, to perhaps provide warning

---


or check assumptions or clarifying something previously unknown. On the other hand, neglect also significantly diminishes the morale of the Americans working in the IC. What is the value of their work if no one is reading it?

Danger #3: Erosion of public faith. Both of these dangers taken together contribute in my mind to the longer term—and more serious—issue of undermining public faith, public confidence in institutions broadly, and in intelligence institutions more specifically. Discourse about the IC matters. Having the most powerful man in the world compare the IC’s handling of unverified reports on Russian intelligence to Nazi Germany matters. It matters to the US public’s view of the community and it matters to who will join that community in the future. I have had countless conversations since the election with students and they have almost all asked this question: should I still work for the Intelligence Community? These are talented young women and men who want this career—despite the fact that they would make more at a bank and would certainly have an easier path to employment. What should we tell them? How can we restore public faith in the IC and consequently ensure that it will attract the best personnel?

With those questions and broad harms in mind, I would like to use the rest of my time to talk about the specific area that most alarms me: the review of whether prisons outside the United States should be reopened.

Questions like the one before us—whether coercive practices should be employed when you need information to save American lives—is one of the most critical ones facing our generation. It is not a simplistic question. Mr. Trump believes that it is. In a recent ABC News interview, Mr. Trump said that he wants to do everything that is within the bounds of what you are allowed to do legally. However, we did not end up in this place because of lawlessness. We ended up in this place because of law. The treatment was scrutinized and authorized by law. By lawyers. The extent to which both the DOD and CIA interrogators’ conduct breached America’s international legal obligations—even its domestic legal obligations—it did so precisely because it was following the interpretations of the law that were developed after 9/11. In this recent interview, Trump reiterated his claim that he believes torture works. In November, Donald Trump told The New York Times that his nominee for Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, had

---

changed his thinking on the efficacy of torture. He said that Mattis had told him, “give me a pack of cigarettes and a couple of beers and I do better with that than I do with torture.” This was seen to be a shift away from the campaign promise to bring back “a hell of a lot worse than waterboarding.” However, Wednesday’s interview seemed to revert back to this idea of torture “working.”

Asking whether it works is the wrong question. Virtually all interrogators agree that the best intelligence comes from non-coercive means. Those who use conventional non-coercive approaches believe them optimal. However, some who use coercive approaches believe them optimal. There has been surprisingly little scientific study of different modes of interrogation.

Did it produce intelligence? Of course. Of the three people waterboarded: Abu Zubaydah, one of the first high value detainees captured who was believed to be central to al-Qa’ida leadership, gave information about Khalid Shaikh Muhammad. Abu Zubaydah gave info that led to the capture of Ramzi bin al-Shibh, whose information led to Khalid Shaikh Muhammad. Khalid Shaikh Muhammad was the overall director or operational planner of al-Qa’ida. He was well versed with the organizational structure of al-Qa’ida and its plan for many future attacks. He saw himself as a warrior and a martyr and was initially non-cooperative during coercive interrogations. In fact, I believe he tapped his fingers during waterboarding. Khalid Shaikh Muhammad’s information led to the capture of Hambali, who was responsible for 2002 Bali nightclub bombing, and his brother as well. Khalid Shaikh Muhammad gave critical information on al-Qa’ida’s attempts to develop bio weapons. It is ultimately unknowable whether intelligence obtained from detainees who were subjected to torture could have been obtained through other means or from other individuals. Former CIA Director John Brennan has claimed that we don’t know if the intelligence gained could have been gotten any other way. We also don’t know if more information could have been obtained through non-coercive means.

---

Torture is not against the law because it doesn’t work. On the contrary, it is against the law because it is a moral abomination.

We cannot return to those intelligence gathering measures of the early years of the Bush Administration. The draft Executive Order stated a revocation of the 2009 EO 13491\(^\text{13}\) and EO 13492\(^\text{14}\) as well as a reinstatement of 2007 EO 13440.\(^\text{15}\) Of the two orders to be revoked: one closed down the detention center at Guantánamo Bay, the other ended CIA “black site” prisons, limited interrogations to methods in the Army Field Manual, and granted the Red Cross access to detainees.\(^\text{16}\) The 2007 EO 13440 enabled the agency to continue a revised form of the program to that extent that it detailed which prisoner abuses counted as war crimes, thus allowing tactics that were not on the list, such as sleep deprivation.\(^\text{17}\) Mr. Obama revoked that order as part of his 2009 overhaul of detention legal policy. The proposal also focuses on the military detention center at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, saying it should be used for newly captured prisoners. No detainee has been sent there since Obama took office in 2009. Any new Executive Order such as the draft one we have seen from Mr. Trump would challenge the legislation passed as part of the 2016 National Defense Authorization Act which mandates that detainees under the control of any US personnel, including the CIA, should not be subjected to techniques other than those allowed in the field manual.\(^\text{18}\)

But it is important to stress now—we cannot allow our country to return to the intelligence gathering methods of the early years of the Bush Administration in the war on terror. The harms from this program were profound. At its essence: torture is unacceptable. We should not let an adversary decide who we are and what we will do. Among other impacts, the torture decisions eroded legal regimes, weakened US alliances, and damaged US operational capability in the field. We need to talk—in forums such as these—about the harms of politicization, neglect, and the erosion of faith in intelligence and the IC. We further need to


\(^\text{17}\) Ibid.

address that legal gymnastics that happened before to allow torture in the name of US national security. We cannot allow that to happen again.

About the Author

Professor Elizabeth Grimm Arsenault is an Assistant Professor of Teaching in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University. Professor Arsenault teaches courses on international relations, intelligence, international security, international law, and terrorism and counterterrorism. She was presented with the Dorothy Brown Award in 2012 by the Georgetown University Student Association on behalf of the undergraduate student body and received the School of Foreign Service Faculty of the Year Award in 2012. She received her Ph.D. in Government from Georgetown University, M.A. in Security Policy Studies from the George Washington University, and B.A. in Government and History from The College of William & Mary. She has also worked in the defense and security sectors of the US government.
Intelligence Challenges: An Historical Perspective

Mark Currie

What follows will essentially be a series of observations and insights about ways to think about countering political violence and associated intellectual challenges. I will pick up on some of the themes that have emerged so far in this conference. Accordingly, my focus will be on:

• Memory and lessons learned;
• Demons and predators; and
• Organizational design.

I offer examples from historical British and current academic experience that, by analogy, may be of relevance and interest to present-day challenges faced by the United States and allies.

Memories and Lessons Learned

I would suggest that intelligent responses to political violence depend on a knowledge of the relevant past. Professor Christopher Andrew's magisterial official history of MI5, the UK's security service, draws attention to a condition he names 'Historical Attention Span Deficit Disorder' (HASDD). He writes, "Short-termism has been the distinguishing intellectual vice of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. For the first time in recorded history there has been a widespread assumption that the experience of all previous generations is irrelevant to present policy."¹ This might seem to some of us, and certainly it does to me as citizen and taxpayer, careless and unnecessarily wasteful.

A recent volume, Empire of Secrets, by one of Professor Andrew’s pupils, demonstrates convincingly that the decolonization of the British Empire in the last century was beset by problems of HASDD. The same mistakes were repeated as Great Britain, faced with violent opposition to its continuing rule, pulled out of Malaya, Kenya, Aden, Palestine, and Cyprus. These serial lapses included an initial reluctance to invest adequately in police, military, and intelligence; brutal treatment; acts of revenge; and ignorance about what the ‘enemy’ was doing and wanted.²

Were lessons ultimately learned in these theatres applied to the Troubles in Northern Ireland? You will have your own views, but to this observer the answer is eventually ‘yes’, but after an unfortunate period of, yet again, making many similar mistakes. My evidence would

include the use of internment without trial, as well as coercive interrogation techniques, which, while they lasted, were gifts to IRA recruitment.

Perpetrators of political violence do not suffer from HASDD. Their identities are, in part, formed by memories of both past glory and past trauma. Those who think of themselves as victims—nations subject to attack, as well as terrorists and insurgents among others—have long memories indeed and wish to avenge their grievances. Citizens of North America remember the Alamo, remember Pearl Harbor. Salafi jihadists remember the Crusades. The atrocities committed by the British in Afghanistan in 1842 after their defeat and retreat of the previous year are still part of the oral traditions of that country. And I doubt that Iraqi folk memory will have forgotten the cavalier punishment of civilians during the revolt against the British Mandate in Mesopotamia (Iraq) following the First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

Killing and torture in the Global War on Terror will similarly be remembered and inspire our enemies for generations. The shame will live on to the lasting benefit of those whose murderous activities we wish to stop, prevent, or at least contain. We heard earlier from Daveed Gartenstein-Ross the suggestion that perhaps national security communities might learn from the sporting world where evaluation of performance and adjusting practice in the light of such review is a long established, accepted, and essential habit.

Is this something that is sufficiently done in the worlds of intelligence and national security? Are these communities sufficiently rigorous in conducting cost/benefit analyses of their investment in, for example, homeland security? Studies published by the Oxford University Press in 2011 and 2016 concluded that cost/benefit analyses had barely featured in the US Department of Homeland Security responses to 9/11, notwithstanding the spending of an additional one trillion dollars in domestic counterterrorism. Have your investments in national security at home

---

7 Alex Danchev, *On Art and War and Terror*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2011): ‘Shame is enduring. In the Muslim world the story of the shame will be told, Scheherazade-like, for years to come. In the United States and its satrapies awareness will sink in, slowly, painfully, like dripping water on the Western conscience.’ p. 189.
and overseas since 9/11 enabled the citizens of this great country to feel safer? These two studies, on the basis of extensive polling data, suggest the answer is resoundingly in the negative. 

**Demons and Predators**

Victims of grievances, including most terrorists, not only have long memories, they know that their violence is justified and what they do is right. They know that their problems—past, present, and future—are the fault of others (often us). They tend to see themselves as ordinary people who reluctantly (in most cases) have become warriors in order to fight in a righteous cause to protect their culture, identity, territory, kith, and kin against an aggressor at whose hands they feel they have suffered.

There is a fascinating and compelling literature on this—including by my colleague from St Andrews’ Department of Psychology, Professor Stephen Reicher—with significant implications (at least in my view) for effective countering of political violence. People who do atrocious things—terrorists, torturers, war criminals, insurgents, killers in genocide—are our fellow human beings. With exceptions mentioned helpfully by Gary Ermutlu earlier in this conference, they are mostly like us. They are ordinary and do these terrible things because they believe that to do so is right.

Do you know Leonard Cohen’s poem “All There is to Know about Adolph Eichmann”? It makes this point vividly:

- **EYES:** Medium
- **HAIR:** Medium
- **WEIGHT:** Medium
- **DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:** None
- **NUMBER OF FINGERS:** Ten
- **NUMBER OF TOES:** Ten

---


INTELLIGENCE: Medium

What did you expect?

Talons?

Oversize incisors?

Green saliva?

Madness?"90

An intelligence challenge is to get inside these ordinary people’s heads, to get as far as we can in empathizing with them in order to understand what they want, how they think, to understand their aspirations, what attracts them to their cause, their cultural products11, their mythology, and their imaginaries. For, as Alan Wolfe wrote in his Political Evil, “Unless we are clear about the nature of what we are fighting we are likely to fight it the wrong way.”12

This suggests that great care needs to be taken with the terms of public debate. After all, remember the delighted enthusiasm with which people in Great Britain and Germany went to war against each other in 1914. Othering our enemies and describing them in terms of a Manichean struggle, while powerful, can, in the light of history, also be seen as unwise. Among other consequences is the reinforcement of the overestimation of what human violence can achieve.13 When we have been convinced that our enemies are demons—they are sub-human, evil, vermin, parasites, or contagious pollutants14—it becomes all too easy to torture and kill

---

10 I am grateful to the late and great Professor Alex Danchev, a wonderful St Andrews colleague, an original and courageous scholar, as well as an inspiring teacher, for drawing attention to this poem by using it as an epigraph in his 2016 volume, On Good and Evil and the Grey Zone (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press) p.194.
11 This is a reference to Professor Thomas Hegghammer’s ‘Why do Terrorists Weep?’, the text of his Paul Wilkinson Memorial Lecture, 16 April 2015 available at hegghammer.com
14 A poem by Sam Keen, To Create An Enemy, helps to make this point:

Exaggerate each feature until man is
Metamorphosed into beast, vermin, insect.
Fill in the background with malignant
Figures from ancient nightmares – devils,
Demons, myrmidons of evil.
When your icon of the enemy is complete
You will be able to kill without guilt,
them, to revert to the response of predation. And they, the other, ‘the dog-headed cannibals’\textsuperscript{15}, become legitimate prey.\textsuperscript{16}

It is perhaps not a coincidence that our weapons and fighting formations are so often named according to this trope of predation.\textsuperscript{17} Has there been sufficient cost/benefit analysis in relation to the use of Predator drones? How does the cost/benefit equation work out here when the death of innocents, associated reputational damage, and the effects on recruitment to the causes of terrorists and insurgents are taken into account?

**Organizational Design**

My question here is whether national security arrangements have the optimum balance between competition and cooperation? Some reflections on how we manage, or fail to manage, working across organizational boundaries in academia might be instructive. The short answer is that mostly we are not good enough at this. The St Andrews and Georgetown cooperation exemplified by the organization of this conference is a wonderful exception, thanks in large part to the legacy of Professor Paul Wilkinson and the continuing determination of his successors as well as of his co-founder of St Andrews’ Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, our host today, Professor Bruce Hoffman.

We, at least too often in the UK Academy, seem to be particularly susceptible to what Freud called the “narcissism of small differences”. We love the stovepipes of our different departments, disciplines, and areas of expertise. We use, of course, professional short hand just as all professions do but so often this can be used to obscure rather than to illumine. We seem unusually attracted by binary distinctions. The conventions of debate do not always help.

---

Slaughter without shame.

\textsuperscript{15} This is a reference to Pope Gregory IX preaching crusade against the Mongols. See Edmund Leach, *Custom, Law and Terrorist Violence*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997) p. 35.


\textsuperscript{17} A particular example is the name of the current drone of choice used by the US for remote surveillance and killing, the Predator. Other examples abound: ‘For example ... U.S. aviation squadrons such as the Black Lions, Blue Wolves, Tigers, Wildcats, Red Lions, Wolfpack, Jaguars, Grey Wolves, and Cougars. Americans soar into battle in aircraft with names like Harrier, Hellcat, Cougar, Raptor, and Tiggershark, while the Chinese pilot the Flying Leopard and Fierce Dragon.’ Also, ‘Serbian Tigers’, ‘Tamil Tigers’ and the ‘Wolf Brigade’ militia. Smith, op. cit. Endnote 56, pp 251-2.
The assumption that “contested societal issues can and should be resolved through debate” can be unhelpful. “Debates are combative in nature, and are about listening for flaws, defending assumptions and pursuing a predetermined outcome. They are about winning and losing. Furthermore their outcomes are vulnerable to bias….Debate increases polarization…. [This] recognition that debate [can have] unhelpful outcomes is not novel; it was the flawed nature of debate that motivated Socrates to propose dialectics as a preferred alternative.”\textsuperscript{18}

Furthermore, “…the words we use to describe intellectual effort are aggressive words. We attack problems, or get our teeth into them. We master a subject when he have struggled with and overcome its difficulties. We sharpen our wits hoping that our mind will develop a keen edge in order that we may better dissect a problem into its component parts.”\textsuperscript{19}

What can we do in our different worlds to remedy any of this? The answer, if there is one, lies in leadership to promote cooperation and to sideline unconstructive, rivalrous competition.

Conclusion

So, what does anyone facing the challenges we have been contemplating need to know in response? I suggest that it would help:

- To pay due attention to our past mistakes, and to evaluate and learn lessons from our more recent and current performance;
- To invest in even better knowing our enemies, ensuring that we have access to expertise that enables this, and to what can be done—another leadership challenge—to seek to ensure that such insights carry weight at all levels of decision-making, including the political;
- To take extreme care of the ways in which our enemies are characterized in political rhetoric and public debate. As a species we are outstanding at peaceful cooperation, dispute resolution, empathy, and altruism—without these qualities we would not have our extraordinary cultures and civilization—but all too quickly we can be persuaded of the need to counter violence with violence, evil with evil.\textsuperscript{20}

And the results of this in the modern world could be devastating indeed.

\textsuperscript{18} Time for Change? Climate Science Reconsidered, London: University College, 2014, p. 103. This report investigated the reasons why climate science had seemed to have had less than optimal impact on public understanding of the issues.


\textsuperscript{20} Smith, op. cit. p. xvi.
And finally, two questions:

- Might the terms of our public debate become more inspiring than that of those who seek to destroy us? Might we get beyond rhetoric that carries with it the danger of dividing our societies and that can all too readily get mired in arguments about what to call IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh, rather than inspire in relation to more strategic issues? Might we find things to say that would appeal even more to deracinated youth than the calls of death and destruction of AQ and ISIL? 

- And do we understand sufficiently the extent to which the threats associated with terrorism are constructs of our counterterrorist, foreign, and security policies and practice. I would suggest that this is a major research challenge for the communities that are represented at this conference.

About the Author

Dr. Mark Currie is a Senior Fellow at the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews. He studied Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge and Theology at Oxford. His doctorate on Islam in South Asia, also from Oxford, is published by the OUP as The Shrine and Cult of Muin al-din Chishti of Ajmer. He is co-editor of the series, New Directions in Terrorism Studies, for which he has contributed to three volumes. As well as supervising a range of research projects, he teaches a Masters course, Fundamentals of Terrorist Violence: Enablers, Constraints and Implications for State Responses. Before joining St Andrews, he pursued a public service career in diplomacy, defense and education.

---

21 This point is made powerfully in Philippe-Joseph Salazar, Paroles Armées: Comprendre et combattre la propaganda terroriste (Paris: Lemieux Éditeur, 2015). An English language review of Armed Words: Understanding and Fighting Terrorist Propaganda by Agnès Poirier with a helpful summary may be found in The New Review, The Observer, 29/11/15, p. 4
Four Policy Actions Needed to Strengthen US and Coalition Efforts Against al-Qa’ida, ISIL, and Hizballah

Paula Doyle

I hail from rural America—a place that honors hard work, plain speaking, and a deeply held belief that there is no higher calling than to be a good neighbor and a citizen servant. I am grateful for every opportunity that I’ve been given to serve this country and thank all of you who currently do or aspire to do the same. I join you today as a veteran intelligence practitioner who has watched every transition since President Reagan. For anyone with any doubts about joining the CIA, other parts of the Intelligence Community, or the broader policy community in light of recent events, my counsel to you is that citizen servants perform vital day-to-day work. You will be just fine.

The incoming administration faces the most complex set of counterterrorism challenges in our nation’s history. Core al-Qa’ida and its affiliates, ISIL and its decentralized global movement, and Iran-backed Lebanese Hizballah pose strategic and tactical challenges that require the Administration’s attention in four immediate areas:

1. Formulate and issue new CT policy objectives backed by sufficient sustained resources;
2. Identify the appropriate mix of integrated all-source intelligence, military, and law enforcement capabilities and authorities required to implement the new policy objectives;
3. Direct appropriate departments and agencies to update and diversify their arsenal of offensive and defensive cyber capabilities and issue new authorities that give policymakers, intelligence professionals, and warfighters the widest range of options; and
4. Conduct periodic reviews of our CT partnership arrangements with, at a minimum, the governments of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq (to include the Iraqi Kurds), Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Syrian Kurds.

I will spend a few minutes talking about each of these four areas, but first—a few comments to set the stage.

Core al-Qa’ida (AQ) remains organized, disciplined, and lethal. Sixteen years of vast investments in military operations as well as broader coalition and capacity building efforts have
degraded core al-Qa’ida and thwarted multiple efforts to terrorize our homeland again. Despite these successes, however, key AQ leaders and vital operational elements continue to train and operate in select areas of Pakistan and in far too many areas of Afghanistan. Where AQ and the Taliban have regained control over swaths of territory, they have proven to be a very rough crowd. They threaten village elders and families and offer them little choice but to cooperate. They impose uncompromising loyalty expectations and consequences that defy all sense of humanity. Their lethal prowess and strict adherence to Sharia law intimidates and influences elements within the Pakistani and Afghan governments.

Core al-Qa’ida poses two specific immediate challenges. Counterterrorism operations mounted from specific locations in Afghanistan and the region have given core AQ, its Taliban and Haqqani partners, and elements within the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan ample opportunities to observe and develop countermeasures against some of the high tech, low tech, and HUMINT methods US intelligence and US forces use in the region. US longevity in any physical location places a premium on the constant need for reliable force protection, new intelligence sources and methods, and thorough vetting of the Pakistani and Afghan units we and our coalition partners train—and on whom we depend for access to ungoverned areas. The second challenge stems from the public nature of announcements regarding US drawdowns and base consolidations and realignments in Afghanistan over the past few years. Public debate is a powerful and necessary part of our democracy, but the final decisions announcing specific dates for withdrawal and consolidation came without an accompanying strong promise that the US would return in force if and when al-Qa’ida and the Taliban retook hard-won territory. The public messaging emboldened AQ and its affiliates; they hunkered down and patiently rebuilt. Simultaneously, core AQ’s sworn affiliates in Yemen, North and East Africa, the Subcontinent, and even Southeast Asia have grown and adapted; each has proven quite capable of recruiting, training, destabilizing more regions, and mounting lethal operations against the United States and our allies.

Moving on to ISIL—the air and land war in Aleppo, Raqqa, and Mosul will not mark the end of or deliver a deathblow to ISIL. Denying them unfettered access to safe havens, operational commanders, and lucrative oil revenues remains, however, a crucial objective for the Trump Administration.

If we divorce for just a moment ISIL and its web of Sunni terrorist partners from the vexing set of bilateral and multilateral motives and self-interests at play with at least a dozen key state and aspiring state actors—ISIL will remain a powerful global movement that appeals to those who are, or profess to be, disenfranchised. ISIL’s social media messages target displaced
population centers and refugee camps in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Gaza—some of which are home to second- and third-generation family members born into these camps. I recently visited Lebanon and saw several camps; they are filled with poverty, hopelessness, and anger. Adding fuel are second-generation immigrants currently living in Europe, Asia, Australia, and the US who have not found productive ways to integrate into society.

ISIL’s artful use of social media and other cyber methods to target, motivate, and train new recruits online far surpasses those of Anwar al-Awlqi, who launched AQAP’s online “Inspire Magazine.” Given ISIL’s demonstrated proficiency online, we must be prepared for its global network to continue inspiring radicalization and terrorism acts around the world. We also must brace ourselves for cyber attacks and cyber blackmail efforts against critical US infrastructure, public figures, news media outlets, and other targets they deem lucrative.

Now for the most consequential terrorism challenge: Iran-backed Hizballah. The airwaves throughout this young century have been focused largely on AQ and its affiliates and ISIL. Hizballah, however, is by far the most sophisticated and strategically effective of three. It masterminded and mounted two attacks against the US embassy in Beirut in April 1983 and September 1984; it attacked the US Marine Barracks, which also housed French colleagues, in October 1983. In June 1996, Iran-backed Hizballah mounted the attack against a US military and coalition housing compound called Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia. One can argue that lack of decisive action against Hizballah during those early years gave it and Iran the confidence and the experience required to mount full-on military operations against Israel in 1996 and 2006. It successfully and repeatedly embedded with the Iranians to target US and coalition forces in Iraq. Its direct involvement with Iran today against ISIL and al-Nusrah in Syria and Iraq provokes grave concerns with our Five Eyes and European partners and our allies in Israel, Turkey, and the Gulf States.

The long wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria—and the civil war in Yemen—have unleashed centuries-old grievances across the Sunni-Shia landscape and have prompted Shia-dominated population centers to expect a larger role in self-governance and much greater access to education, training, and jobs. Iran has been flexing its military power well beyond her borders for over a decade, reigniting concerns about her ambitions of re-establishing “Greater Persia.” As Iran quickly and confidently swooped in to assist Assad and Russia, our important allies in Israel, Turkey, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia expressed and continue to express intractable concerns.

Like it or not, Hizballah in Lebanon is no longer synonymous with terrorism. The Party of God has been building hospitals and schools, winning elections, and governing or co-governing Lebanon for years. As a democratically elected political party, the Party has worked to
cordon off its militant terrorist arm from its day-to-day management of internal affairs. Every US administration since Reagan has treated Hizballah and Iran as co-equal enemies. But these are curious times and counterterrorism objectives sometimes generate unusual bedfellows. If the Lebanese government offers assistance in arresting, questioning, and sharing information on ISIL activities, we will listen. At the same time, the Party of God sends chills down more than a few spines in Washington when it approaches US officials with the proposition that we are “allies” now in the fight against ISIL. Add Russian engagement with Iran and Hizballah into this mixture and we can quickly see the how tangled the world of counterterrorism policy becomes.

Given this very challenging set of threats, I offer four actions requiring the Administration’s immediate attention.

1. **Formulate and issue new policy objectives.**

   It will be important for the Administration to quickly set new CT policy objectives, along with the standards and conditions that define progress and success, and the budget implications. Departments and agencies will need this guidance in order to build upon extant programs, cull out and defund unnecessary ones, and develop new capabilities. Importantly, the Administration’s new CT policy objectives will impact relationships around the world; all of our key allies will be eager to understand the president’s new CT strategy and objectives to see if and how their own CT strategies fit in, and whether they may incur any financial, equipment, or human resource costs in terms of new burden sharing arrangements.

   Most new American administrations, especially when political parties change, commission one or more study or review groups to help the vice president and national security advisor formulate policy options for the president’s consideration, along with commensurate budget recommendations. In the post-9/11 period, Presidents Bush and Obama spent three to six months working on comprehensive Iraq and Afghan strategy reviews. Unfortunately, our CT enemies always get a say; they mount operations at times and places of their choosing. Today’s overall terrorist threat environment may not afford the Trump Administration the luxury of three to six month reviews. CT-tested experts armed with historic and current records will be in the strongest position to quickly support White House studies or reviews.
2. Identify the appropriate mix of integrated all-source intelligence, military, and law enforcement capabilities and authorities required to implement the new policy objectives.

Terrorists of all stripes need money, communications, and reliable logistics mechanisms in place to manage their direct and indirect networks of people, weapons, and information. Each represents an important traceable vulnerability. As the Administration considers its policy guidance and directives, it will want to inventory and evaluate the effectiveness of the integrated capabilities we use today with HUMINT sources as well as air, land, sea, cyber, and space-based collection and communications programs. This includes understanding which effective methods are underfunded, under equipped, and understaffed, and which facilities, tools, and techniques are so well known to the enemy that we should stop using them. The review should include the CT collection postures, as well as the information sharing and “activism” track records and capabilities of our foreign partners and closest allies.

Funding may not prove to be the biggest resource challenge, but the Administration can expect to find experience and skills deficits in key areas. Defeating AQ, ISIL, and Hizballah requires real-time accurate fusion of all-source intelligence; near-native language skills and deep expertise about each organization’s leadership, networks, and weaknesses; and understanding the capabilities and capacity of the foreign partners with which we engage around the world. Age-appropriate retirements are at an all time high in several parts of the IC and deep funding cuts in the DOD have hit mid-career war-tested veterans very hard. Recruiting, training, and developing our CT workforces for warfighting, cyber, HUMINT and technical collection, analysis, and foreign languages will take time.

A few words here on authorities:

Digital communications have gone global and are increasingly encrypted. Free mobile applications—many of them American—are widely used among aspiring terrorist recruits and core commanders. This global reality requires two immediate program reviews:

First, President Obama issued Presidential Policy Directive-28, which limited and eliminated several warranted surveillance programs in the aftermath of Edward Snowden’s defection to Russia. If the Trump Administration opts to reestablish any of those warranted surveillance programs, it will take time—maybe years—for the IC to rebuild and deploy appropriate technologies, reestablish trusted relationships with industry and foreign partners who are willing to assist, and appropriately staff the FISA Court, DOJ, and IC offices to oversee each agency’s compliance with US law and policy.

Second, as illustrated when FBI Director Comey tried and failed to persuade Apple to unlock the encrypted contents of just one specific iPhone used by the known San Bernardino
terrorists, our nation has not yet had a thorough enough 21st century policy debate on the best way to balance our First Amendment right to privacy versus the president’s obligation to protect our national security. The global ISIL “movement” presents just one vital reason the Trump Administration and the Congress should welcome and vigorously debate this topic soon, and determine the best way forward. Remember: all of our enemies get a vote here, and Team US is behind the eight ball on this one.

3. The third action requires a cohesive offensive and defensive cyber strategy that ensures policymakers have the widest range of options at the ready.

The United States invented and unleashed the Internet across the globe; we have leveraged it to improve just about every aspect of our daily lives. But, there is a very important dark side of the Internet that our enemies—criminals, terrorists, and strategic adversaries alike—are leveraging at the expense of our national and economic security. As your former Deputy National Counterintelligence Executive, I can say unambiguously that Americans tend to be too trusting of the technologies in their pockets, on their iPads, and on their desktops. Widely publicized Russian, Chinese, and North Korean hacking events over the past two years are a clarion call for everyone to please pay more attention to cyber hygiene, strong passwords, and multiple layers of authentication and encryption when creating, storing, computing, and transferring any information that is private, proprietary, or sensitive.

The Trump Administration will need the best cyber experts to review extant offensive and defensive cyber security policies and authorities, expand upon many of them, work with the Congress to resource departments and agencies appropriately, and set high expectations for full implementation. The same goes for every American industry that is critical to our economic and national security. The Administration and Congress need to formulate and pass legislation that directs targeted investments to private-public partnerships designed to accelerate the constant development and delivery of specifically tailored world-class cyber security capabilities across all US critical infrastructures. Doing so is vital to shoring up our defenses against cyber attacks from terrorists as well as our more strategic enemies.

Most terrorism threats and actors move fast while a few remain under one or more patient microscopes for months or years (think Abbottabad). All of them require the IC, law enforcement, and DOD to have timely access to data and state of the art tools and technologies that enable and support real-time collection, analysis, and endgame execution. Conflict zone operations require real-time feeds, be it from Intelligence Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) platforms, satellite imagery, cyber methods, or vital human sources. The level of threats we
face today call for sustained resource levels that not only maintain, but encourage the constant development and adaptation of technologies and techniques we will need for these vital missions.

Our citizens and worldwide counterterrorism partners expect strong US leadership and expertise. The overall terrorism threat landscape, especially that which incorporates a significant cyber element, requires an organized approach on a par with the “Manhattan Project” to fuel public-private partnerships designed to rapidly and securely develop and deploy next generation cyber, space-based, as well as air-, land-, and sea-based capabilities and technologies that have not yet been seen by AQ, ISIL, Hizballah or any of our more strategic adversaries that wish to see us stall or fail.

4. Lastly, the Administration will need to conduct disciplined periodic reviews of our CT partnership arrangements.

Counterterrorism is a complex team sport with governments around the world. The value of our foreign partnerships is not measured in a “transactional” manner in which, for example, Country A gives us ten reports and we reciprocate with ten. Some singular reports, of course, are invaluable. Some countries offer priceless geographic proximity to the enemy; some offer unique languages, sectarian, and cultural perspectives we need; and yet others are willing to run very dangerous operations with us or on our behalf under the most hostile and austere conditions.

The IC works hard to establish, develop, and protect our alliances as a core value. Ideally, we engage with competent, professionalized partners who share our worldview and counterterrorism objectives. At times, however, the world is not always so tidy. As geographic hosts to core AQ actors and activities, Afghanistan and Pakistan require an especially rigorous periodic review to understand exactly where they stand on their commitments, willingness, and abilities to defeat core AQ. The Huthi alliance with Iran represents another significant challenge to our CT work against AQAP in Yemen as the Sunni-Shia civil war plays out. It places considerable strains on the region in ways that require periodic reviews of our CT partnerships with all of the Arabian Peninsula states. The Administration will need regular assurances that these partners are productively engaged and are able to keep sufficient pressure on AQAP to limit their safe havens and ability to mount operations against the United States and our allies.

Then there is the biggest policy challenge of all. Fighting ISIL cannot, of course, be divorced from the realities of the region. Turkey and Jordan are under tremendous strains both internally and externally. The Iraqi and Syrian Kurds are proving to be effective warfighters, but they have entirely different motivations than those of Iraq and Assad-led or opposition-led Syria. The US-Kurdish relationships of any kind directly threaten our relationship with Turkey and,
coupled with Russian and Iranian and Hizballah involvement at unambiguous cross-purposes in
the region, place unsustainable strains on the NATO alliance. So, the Administration will need
periodic reviews of each CT partner involved in the ISIL fight—but with a much larger scope
than just CT.

Closing Remarks

I’ll close with a few comments about the current environment between the new
Administration and the Intelligence Community. In my nearly 32 years of public service, I’ve
seen presidents and Oval Office personnel challenge us weekly if not daily—and we were
frequently called out to defend our understanding of the intelligence record and our projections.
Most times, discussions and heated debates occurred in the privacy of the Situation Room or at
Langley, the Office of the DNI, the Pentagon, or State. The private settings were in secure
vaults where the entire intelligence record could be discussed.

In the post 2004 era, the Intelligence Community implemented new standards for the use
of the words “low, medium, and high confidence” level statements on intelligence judgments and
national estimates. Those words have specific meanings. They are based on the strength or
weakness of supporting documentation and layers of peer reviews. Analytic judgments and
opinions do find their way into formal reports when IC officers must judge the implication of a
gap in information; but those analytic judgments and opinions are called out as just that.

Our first big post-2004 test came with the 2007 NIE on the Status of Iran’s Nuclear
Weapons Program. President Bush declassified the Key Judgments from this NIE and made
them available to the American people and the world audience. I would note that this NIE has
stood the test of time—and it included both high and medium confidence judgments. As former
Director Hayden has stated in some of his public engagements, the Key Judgments were not
exactly popular with some policymakers. The judgment that Iran had suspended its nuclear
weapons program in late 2003 did not conform with certain policymakers’ long-held convictions
that Iran was on a permanent trajectory to have a fully-functioning nuclear weapons program. I
was the CIA’s Chief of Operations for Iran at the time, and can attest that the Agency and IC
worked seamlessly on that 2007 NIE. We have done so on dozens of NIEs since that time, and
on hundreds of products and the President’s Daily Briefs for Presidents Bush and Obama. When
there were unresolved disagreements among community members—and there often were—the
documents said so and why.

Not infrequently, the IC’s confidence-based approach runs counter to policymakers’
views, many of which are guided by the public record and matters of conscience and conviction.
Elected officials, after all, run on values-based platforms on which voters elect them to office. American citizens gain access to classified intelligence reports only if they are in specific jobs, or are in elected or appointed positions. When confidence-based intelligence judgments conflict with the public record or views based upon strong conscience and convictions, the IC generally relies on established mechanisms to resolve those conflicts. The Congress holds classified hearings, and the entire policymaking apparatus exchanges papers and holds discussions and debates in classified settings. Throughout these processes, the IC keeps collecting information to address gaps and keeps updating the intelligence record. Over time, the president makes the final call—and everyone salutes and moves forward together.

Conflict without managed confrontation is generally unproductive when it comes to resolving differences on matters as important as our national security. CIA and other IC colleagues learn how to manage tough and leading questions and all types of management styles. They know that there are haters and screamers on both sides of the aisle, and they also know there are very thoughtful policymakers who welcome follow-up discussions as they formulate their positions. In the end, the IC is comprised of public servants with access to highly classified and sensitive information at home and abroad. Those IC officers posted abroad, our foreign partners, and our critical sources take tremendous risks on behalf of the American people. They need to know they enjoy the unyielding support of their government as directed.

The recent very public nature of confrontation with the men and women of the Intelligence Community impacts the workforce, our vital industrial partners, our closest foreign partners, and our critical human sources. Importantly, it emboldens our enemies. We can ill afford AQ, ISIL, or Hizballah assessing the public confrontations as permission to launch a bold attack at our jugular; we can ill afford Russia, Iran, or North Korea assessing that now is the time to keep pressing forward with programs that are antithetical to the United States.

America is at our best when we lead with clear and achievable policy objectives that adapt quickly to the realities on the ground. Successful implementation requires exceptional multidisciplinary leadership and appropriate information sharing at every level; sustained resources; the best possible capabilities and partnerships; the constant introduction of new tools, techniques, and practices against all enemies foreign and domestic; and projects unified national confidence and competence at home and abroad. Counterterrorism is always daunting work—but all of the key ingredients we need for success are well within reach.
About the Author

Paula Doyle retired in December 2016 as one of three CIA Associate Deputy Directors of Operations, where she oversaw worldwide HUMINT operations and activities that required the use of air, land, maritime, space-based and cyber technologies. She was the Deputy National Counterintelligence Executive from 2012–2014, where she oversaw the official US Damage Assessment resulting from Private Manning's 2010 unauthorized disclosures to Wikileaks and led the IC's extensive review of Edward Snowden's unauthorized disclosures and defection to Russia. She led three CIA Stations in Europe, the Levant, and Asia. Prior to joining CIA, she was a Foreign Service Officer in three embassies in Latin America and Europe. She is the recipient of several awards from the CIA, the DNI, DIA, and the NRO—the most significant of which was a CIA Team Trailblazer Award in 2007 for her role in a decade long effort against a significant nuclear proliferation network.
Terrorism and Current Challenges for Intelligence

Paul R. Pillar

Most of the principal challenges confronting intelligence as far as counterterrorism is concerned have been around for a long time. The biggest challenge is the inherent difficulty of discovering plots that involve small numbers of people who do their planning and preparation in secret and are highly conscious of operational security. Another challenge involves inflated and unrealistic public expectations, especially the expectation that with enough intelligence gathering skill and dot-connecting acumen, any such secret plots ought to be discovered. Related to this are public perceptions that plot-discovery is what counterterrorist intelligence is all about, and the unmeetable zero-tolerance standard that the public and its political representatives tend to impose on counterterrorism. Yet another challenge is the inherent tension between security measures taken in the name of counterterrorism and the values of liberal democracies, especially regarding such things as surveillance and privacy but also involving personal liberties.

If the focus is instead on what is new, and on the implications of current trends and prospective developments, the challenges for counterterrorist intelligence can be found in three areas. One concerns the evolution of the threat. A second entails the evolution of public opinion and public values. The third involves, especially for the United States, implications of the advent of the Donald Trump Administration.

As for the threat, the main ongoing development is that the mini-state created by the so-called Islamic State, or ISIS, is well on the way to being extinguished. ISIS has lost a large proportion of the territory that it seized in its dramatic offensives a couple of years ago. In Iraq, it is in the process of losing control of its biggest prize, the city of Mosul. In Syria, its adversaries are gearing up to recapture the de facto ISIS capital of Raqqa. However good for other reasons are these conventional setbacks to ISIS, the intelligence challenge comes from the ISIS problem assuming a form that is harder for intelligence to follow than it has been to follow the state-like entity in Iraq and Syria.

Extinguishing the mini-state will not mean the end of ISIS. What will ensue will be more dispersed and inchoate than the mini-state, and in those respects will be a more difficult target for intelligence. This follow-on threat will likely include an insurgency in Syria and Iraq. Even more challenging for intelligence to monitor will be totally clandestine cells, which do not even have the kind of visible presence or signatures that an insurgency has. Worse still as an intelligence target will be the ISIS idea continuing to inspire independent actors who, such as the
San Bernardino shooters, invoke ISIS without having any apparent organizational connection to it. It is a question for further scholarly research as to how much military setbacks on Middle Eastern battlefields lessen the inspiration power of a group in the minds of already radicalized individuals in the West. There might not be much lessening. The San Bernardino perpetrators evidently shopped around for a group name to invoke before settling on ISIS; they could have just as easily conducted their attack in someone else’s name instead.

As for public opinion and the values expressed in public opinion, we have seen in the United States in the 15 years since the 9/11 attacks the same sort of swinging of a pendulum of public sentiment as has been seen previously, as time passes since the last major terrorist attack. As the salience of the last past attack lessens, the public becomes less willing to make compromises to privacy and liberty in the name of security and counterterrorism. Of particular importance in this regard has been increasing antipathy among Americans toward bulk collection and analysis of data, especially telecommunications data. This is exactly the kind of intelligence material that is most useful when the main task is not to monitor a known threat such as a named, organized group or quasi-state but instead to identify one emergent threat out of a vast amount of innocence. This is the task of finding those who are not part of any larger organization but who establish themselves as terrorists only when they conduct their first, and perhaps only, attack. The intelligence task is a job akin not only to finding a needle in a haystack, but of trying to determine which pieces of hay in the stack will turn into needles.

The already growing American resistance to some forms of intelligence collection useful in counterterrorism is related to one of the implications of Donald Trump's Presidency. Trump scares many people, not necessarily just with regard to practices directly applicable to counterterrorism, but rather more generally in the sense of unease about ways in which the power of the state might be used to infringe on individual rights and liberties. It is no accident that George Orwell’s 1984 went to the top of the Amazon bestseller list at about the time of Trump’s inauguration. An atmosphere has been created in which public and political resistance to techniques such as bulk collection of telecommunications data is apt to be all the stronger.

Trump also is promoting unrealistic expectations of what can be done in counterterrorism, thus playing on what already was an unfortunate public tendency. In his inaugural address, he referred to “radical Islamic terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the earth.” That objective is impossible to achieve. This rhetoric contrasts with that of the two previous administrations, each of which wisely tried to talk down unrealistic expectations—even when political opponents crassly exploited their remarks. The unrealistic expectations now being promoted set the Intelligence Community up for more consternation.
over “intelligence failures,” which in turn will lead to more disruption through reorganizations rather than the community being allowed to get on with counterterrorism and its other work.

The new Administration also is resurrecting the subject of secret prisons and coercive interrogation methods. This issue will be a significant distraction from the intelligence agencies’ core functions even if none of what is now being talked about gets implemented. To the extent there is implementation, the distraction will be all the greater. There also will likely be a blurring in the public eye between the controversial matter of handling detainees and the normal intelligence functions of an agency such as the CIA. If the former is seen as bad, some of the opprobrium is apt to be transferred to the latter. This will mean more public and political pressure to restrict what is legitimate intelligence activity useful in counterterrorism.

Trump, and even more so some of his subordinates, have looked at terrorism primitively as part of a war between the West and Islam. This is a badly mistaken conception that is counterproductive as far as counterterrorism is concerned, particularly by playing into the propaganda of extremist groups that try to depict just such a war. Both of the last two administrations realized this, as reflected in the care they exercised in their choice of vocabulary. The counterproductivity is a problem for counterterrorism in general, but there are identifiable consequences for intelligence. Insofar as there are more violent radicals and more terrorism, arising from whatever the Administration is saying and doing, that means more of a load on intelligence resources. In some other respects the war-with-Islam concept means additional diversion of intelligence resources from work on real terrorism. The Administration and its supporters in Congress are talking, for example, of designating the Muslim Brotherhood as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). Even if failure to meet the statutory requirements as an FTO means the designation is never made, the review process for considering the issue will consume much time and attention of the bureaucracy, including the intelligence bureaucracy.

The Intelligence Community has an obligation to assess how policies of the Administration are likely either to increase or decrease terrorism. This kind of assessment, undertaken at a strategic and long-range level, is just as much a part of counterterrorist intelligence as is the tactical uncovering of plots (despite the common public conception that it is all a matter of plot uncovering). It always is hard to confront the boss with an assessment that says his policies and pronouncements are not working. Given Trump’s mental posture and thin skin, this is apt to be an even greater challenge for the Intelligence Community during his administration.

That leads to a final point, which concerns the overall bad relationship between this president and the intelligence agencies—probably the worst that the country has seen at the
beginning of any presidency for almost fifty years. One of the Intelligence Community's biggest challenges will be to get this president to listen to what it has to say about the roots and drivers of terrorism. The president is not, to be sure, the action officer when it comes to responding to most counterterrorist intelligence—a point not sufficiently recognized amid criticism leveled at President George W. Bush about what he did or did not do in response to a briefing he received about the al-Qa'ida threat in August 2001. It is more strategic judgments, about how certain sorts of policies and statements about the Muslim world help or hurt counterterrorism, which will be important for the president to absorb.

About the Author

Paul R. Pillar is Non-resident Senior Fellow at the Center for Security Studies of Georgetown University and the Brookings Institution. He retired in 2005 from a 28-year career in the US Intelligence Community. His senior positions included National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia, Deputy Chief of the DCI Counterterrorist Center, and Executive Assistant to the Director of Central Intelligence. He is a Vietnam War veteran and a retired officer in the US Army Reserve. Dr. Pillar's degrees are from Dartmouth College, Oxford University, and Princeton University. His books include Negotiating Peace (1983), Terrorism and U.S. Foreign Policy (2001), Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy (2011), and Why America Misunderstands the World (2016).
Photographs of the Conference

The conference “What the New Administration Needs to Know About Terrorism & Counterterrorism” occurred on January 26-27, 2017 at Georgetown University.

Bruce Hoffman, Director of the Center for Security Studies and Director of the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University

Tim Wilson, Director of the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews, Scotland
Panel I: What Next? Global Trends and Threats

From top right, clockwise: Richard English, Bruce Hoffman, Hanin Ghaddar, Sir David Veness, Tim Wilson, panel

Keynote Address I: Hon. Michael Vickers, former Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence
Panel II: What Next? Regional Trends and Threats

From top right, clockwise: David Maxwell, Christine Fair, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Jytte Klausen, Diego Muro, panel
Panel III: Global Counterterrorism and Regional Structures

*From top right, clockwise: Sir David Veness, Gary Ermutlu, Mary Habeck, Audrey Kurth-Cronin, Fernando Reinares, panel*

Keynote Address II: Dr. Richard English, Queen’s University Belfast
Panel IV: Intelligence Challenges

*From top right, clockwise:* Tim Wilson, Elizabeth Grimm Arsenault, Mark Currie, Paula Doyle, Paul R. Pillar, panel
## Appendix: Acronyms and Transliteration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronyms</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AQ</td>
<td>al-Qa’ida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQAP</td>
<td>al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQI</td>
<td>al-Qa’ida in Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQSL</td>
<td>al-Qa’ida Senior Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBRN</td>
<td>Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSS</td>
<td>Center for Security Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSTPV</td>
<td>Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>Counterterrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNI</td>
<td>Director of National Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>Department of Defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOJ</td>
<td>Department of Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EO</td>
<td>Executive Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETA</td>
<td>Euskadi Ta Askatasuna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FATA</td>
<td>Federally Administered Tribal Areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBI</td>
<td>Federal Bureau of Investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FISA</td>
<td>Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTF</td>
<td>Foreign Terrorist Fighter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTO</td>
<td>Foreign Terrorist Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCTF</td>
<td>Global Counterterrorism Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCTN</td>
<td>Global Counterterrorism Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUMINT</td>
<td>Human Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HVT</td>
<td>High-Value Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IC</td>
<td>Intelligence Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRA</td>
<td>Irish Republican Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRGC</td>
<td>Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIS</td>
<td>The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; also known as ISIL, IS, Islamic State, Daesh, and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCPOA</td>
<td>Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Editor’s Note on Arabic Transliteration

This publication attempts to follow Arabic transliteration principles and guidelines used widely by the United States Government and US Library of Congress. As such, transliterations from Arabic to English including the Roman alphabet characters ‘c’, ‘o’, ‘p’, and ‘e’ have been minimized to the greatest extent possible, with the exception of direct quotes and the spellings of several widely used transliterations of notable places and individuals (e.g., Saddam Hussein, Mosul, Homs).