

PUSHING THE JIHADIST GENIE BACK INTO THE BOTTLE: HOW TO COUNTER THE ONGOING TERRORIST THREAT

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MAY 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recent terrorist attacks have shown that jihadist terror should still be considered a major threat worldwide, and specifically to the stability of the Middle East. While ISIS has lost the physical territory of its caliphate, this did not put an end to the jihadist doctrine that has invaded so many countries. ISIS will continue to maneuver, govern, radicalize, and inspire its followers to carry out both spontaneous and well-planned attacks that challenge authorities around the globe.

This paper first provides a short overview of Jihadist organizations as we know them today, with a central focus on ISIS. Next, it describes the central elements of *the terrorist threat* today. Relying on empirical data collected from terrorist attacks over the last four years, it analyzes ISIS' ever-evolving modus operandi. Next, it suggests a *layered strategy* that defines the core framework that a vigilant country should adopt to meet the challenge ahead.

While countries are grappling with urgent and immediate terrorist challenges, too often they ignore policy problems and long-term planning. Governments should resist this reactive approach, which could prove deadly, and instead adopt a *comprehensive strategy* that will prevent jihadist terrorism in different stages: from radicalization to thwarting an attack in motion.

In formulating governments' response to jihadist terror, this report lays out five strategic dimensions for governments to consider. For each of these dimensions—including *education, legislation, intelligence, enforcement, and defense*—this report provides the framework for a sound strategy on a national level. The report does not prescribe a specific policy or provide a one-size-fits-all solution to the problems it details, but instead gives policymakers the tools with which to identify the blind spots or gaps in their countries' approach to counterterrorism.

Education will deal with national efforts to establish a positive relationship with local Islamic communities and the need to address the problem of radicalization and lack of governance in Islamic countries.

Legislation will address the struggle to find the right balance between democratic rights on one hand and the urgency of public safety on the other, a crucial question as emerging threats challenge notions of what a secure democracy should look like. Creative lawmakers will have to lay down new legal frameworks and not just interpret existing laws.

The *intelligence* dimension will define the challenge of building an effective “alarm system” to continuously monitor terrorist actors and infrastructure, providing the capability to warn against an imminent attack. As terrorists become more sophisticated and operate more clandestinely, intelligence challenges will continue to grow.

Enforcement regards the ability to respond quickly to an alert by methodically managing a process of integration and cooperation between security and intelligence agencies, both domestically and internationally. As the heart of the counterterrorism process, enforcement is the intersection where the various capabilities come together to stop an attack from taking place.

Finally, *defense* is literally the last resort. When all previous measures fail, technology, procedures, protocols, and preventive measures must prevail to keep transportation, aviation, and public gatherings safe.

Ultimately, jihadist terrorism can only be contained, rather than eliminated. It will continue to influence the lives of millions around the world and touch on the very basic activities of everyday life. Yet the impact of terror, and the ability to respond to it, will depend on whether governments adapt and meet the challenge with a comprehensive, long-term, and consistent strategy that grabs the bull by its horns.

INTRODUCTION

On March 19, 2019, flags were flying at half-mast at public buildings in the Netherlands. The gunshots that shattered the tram ride the previous day in the peaceful Dutch city of Utrecht serve as a sobering reminder that jihadist terror is still a major and looming threat. After an intense 7-hour manhunt the terrorist was arrested. The culprit, as in so many other cases, was very predictable: an immigrant gunman with a strong religious inclination, a known offender with a well-established criminal record. The three Dutch victims were identified as a 19-year-old woman that worked in a bar, a 49-year-old coach of a youth soccer club, and a 28-year-old man from Utrecht about whom little is publicly known. Three others, ranging from 20 to 74 years old, were critically injured in the shooting. Jihadist terror had struck again in the heart of Europe. In Sri Lanka, on April 21, 2019 six simultaneous explosions took the lives of more than 250 people. This shattering attack, at the peak of the Easter festivities, would probably be recorded as the most lethal ever by ISIS-linked foreign fighters.¹ In so-called “post-caliphate” times, the capability of terrorists to carry

out successfully such sophisticated and destructive attacks is unbearable for any society. The failure of any government to meet this challenge is inexcusable.

Terrorism has influenced the lives of millions of people around the world in recent years. It has brought massive protests into the streets, shaped economies, influenced cultures, toppled governments, and touched on the very basic activities of everyday life. Some researchers have warned about the potential backlash from ISIS and al-Qaida, given their recent defeats on the Syrian-Iraqi border. They argue that the recent rollback of the vision for a caliphate did not put an end to the jihadist doctrine that has invaded so many minds and countries around the globe, and recommend keeping a wary eye out for the next fight.² In my view, the next fight will see a shift of the jihadist struggle back to its inception as a terrorist entity.

In this paper, I describe the form and shape that the terrorist threat will take and explore the question of how a nation should prepare accordingly. There is no effective one-size-fits-all approach to counterterrorism. Accordingly, the response

suggested in this paper is not a detailed policy prescription for any one country. Rather, it suggests a broad framework for a layered strategy that any vigilant country should adopt *comprehensively*, if it seeks to rise to the challenge that is still ahead.

ISIS 2.0: WHO ARE WE DEALING WITH?

Although ISIS was spawned by al-Qaida and shares its Salafist jihadist ideology, the former represents a unique phenomenon that is falsely empowering Muslim communities the world over and offering them an immediate solution to the severe economic and governance failures in their societies.

ISIS is fueled by current and historic feelings of injustice and repression, and the continuing failure of many countries in the region to resolve their governance problems in the wake of Arab Spring upheaval. These have proven potent catalysts for the group, in combination with the lack of reverence to autocratic regimes and the absence of any competing ideology that can seem both attractive and feasible to populations coping with a breakdown of order brought upon by corruption and lack of security.³

ISIS differs from al-Qaida in its approach regarding conquest of territory and its concept of the *urgent* need to promote the revolutionary aspect of the caliphate by conducting attacks in various geographical areas simultaneously. Against this backdrop, ISIS is fighting al-Qaida for hegemony in the Salafist jihadist world.

The circumstances described above have given rise to a multifaceted, hybrid organization maneuvering on multiple fronts and bent on seizing and controlling territory. Not so long ago, ISIS was based in the heartland of Syria. Now, it has become a more decentralized and international entity with dynamic command, flexibility, and adaptability. The recent rollback in Syria and Iraq has created a more decentralized command-and-control apparatus that allocates more independence to its provinces (*wilayat*) that are spread globally. Indeed, despite its territorial losses in Iraq and Syria, ISIS maintains

a global presence, including declared *wilayat* in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the North Caucasus. Beyond this, the terror group attracts considerable sympathy and has waged attacks in Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, the Philippines, Lebanon, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. ISIS sympathizers have also carried out lone-wolf attacks in a variety of Western countries such as France, Belgium, Germany, and the U.K.

At its peak, by the end of 2014, ISIS controlled a third of Syria and Iraq, seizing oil fields and infrastructure, and dominating the lives of about 8 million people with an annual budget that exceeded \$1 billion.⁴ ISIS controls the peoples it rules using a combination of terror and intimidation, social networks, pre-existing civilian infrastructure, and arrangements with local authorities. An ideological entity that enforces strict Salafist ideology with brutality, it also strives to seize resources on a national scale.⁵

ISIS is still very active and pervasive in the virtual world. The dynamic nature of its achievements generates drama, forming a basis for instilling and perpetuating revolutionary fervor among some segments of Muslim society in the Middle East and worldwide. Finally, ISIS creates terror infrastructures and exports high-profile attacks across the world, either through its direction or inspiration. Patient and adaptive by nature, ISIS is also very adept at branding its failures as a phase in the long road to victory.⁶

WHAT SHOULD WE WORRY ABOUT?

ISIS should still be regarded as a major threat, given the danger it poses to each country and to broader stability in the Middle East.

According to a United Nations Security Council report, between 20,000-30,000 ISIS fighters are still in Syria, including thousands of foreigners.⁷ More than 5000 Western Europeans have travelled to Syria, and since 2014, jihadists have been responsible for more than 100 attacks in Europe, 41 of which were successful.⁸

Any strategic plan to contend with terror of this kind must involve both defeating and discrediting ISIS. Military defeats are vital on the battlefield, but even more so in their ability to demonstrate the group's fallibility and the hollowness of its "divine" mandate. The latter objective is important in demoralizing its forces, decreasing its popular support and ability to inspire followers, and ultimately discrediting it. Simply put, ISIS should no longer be a successful, "cool" organization to pay allegiance to.

Looking ahead, without a caliphate to travel to, potential foreign fighters will probably turn their attention to targets in their own home countries. And, as returning foreign fighters continue to wear out enforcement agencies, local activists are left freer to roam.

In addition, we must consider the possibility of the threat developing new dimensions, including cyberattacks and the potential of chemical weapons falling into the hands of ISIS. Therefore, identifying the systemic nature of the organization—its new center of gravity, modus operandi, command-and-control system, and ability to mobilize munitions and funding on an *ongoing* basis—is a key challenge in efforts to contend with it. This is especially true given its unique character, which ISIS has developed as a calculated strategy to deny others the ability to treat it as a single, tangible entity. Moreover, this is also since most intelligence and enforcement agencies worldwide have had their resources spread very thin for several years, trying to grapple with the increasing threats and the dynamic shape and form that jihadist terror has taken. These agencies are likely to suffer from counterterrorism fatigue, which might have a heavy price.

As Jason Burke described, there have been four major waves of Islamist militancy over the past 50 years, which manifested through great violence in Muslim-majority countries and a series of strategic attacks in the West. The common pattern these waves have shown is an overlooked period of slow growth, a major event bringing the "new" threat to public attention, a phase of struggle, then retreat.⁹ While in our minds we are still celebrating the

victory to take back ISIS territories, we must make sure not to overlook the threat as it takes a new shape.

Additional insights about combating ISIS can be gained through a retrospective overview of the terror activity it conducted in European Union (EU) countries during the last four years. The analysis shows an organization that uses chaos as a tactic, with the absence of a strong common denominator between its attacks.

ISIS was at its peak between 2015-17. In Europe, 63 attacks resulted in 347 dead and 1558 injured. While the 63 attacks comprise only 11 percent of all the terror attacks (separatist, left-wing, right-wing, etc.) that took place in Europe, 98 percent of terrorist fatalities in Europe were the result of jihadist attacks, illustrating the effectiveness of ISIS in inflicting mass damage to civilian life.¹⁰

Jihadist terrorism shifted beyond the EU in 2018. The military and territorial defeat of ISIS did not put an end to the group's ability to fulfill terrorist acts. Rather, it just shifted the choice and location of its targets. By the end of 2017, ISIS suffered major losses on the ground, and with the fall of Raqqa on October 20, it was clear that the caliphate dream had been lost. Still, during 2017, the EU suffered 33 jihadi terror attacks (foiled or completed), which resulted in 62 dead and 819 injured. However, in 2018, only 16 attacks were recorded in the EU, with 15 reported deaths and about 50 injured. A comparative look *outside* of the EU draws a different picture. In 2017, outside of the EU,¹¹ a total of seven attacks were recorded—two in the United States, two in Russia, and the rest in Australia, Canada, and Mali—resulting in 28 people killed. In 2018, *outside* of the EU, there was a significant *increase* in attacks, with at least 20 recorded attacks that resulted in over 65 deaths. A possible interpretation of this data is that in 2018, with a more robust counterterrorism policy in Europe, ISIS shifted its targets, aiming for Western-tainted targets *outside* the EU. The point here is that, even after ISIS' alleged demise in 2017, jihadist terror was alive and kicking in 2018, with Western targets

in its cross-hairs, achieving more than twice as many attacks and deaths outside of the EU than in 2017.

No set of common features defines the targets of ISIS' attacks except for their vulnerability. There was no symbolic significance to the *timing* of the attacks, nor a rationale that could be employed in predicting them. Targets were a diverse mix of government institutions, religious sites, anti-Islamic entities, media outlets, and other civilian targets. ISIS have been very flexible in picking its targets. The *feasibility* of an act of terror was always the highest priority in the selection of targets, to create as much damage and casualties as possible regardless of the symbolic status or "quality" of the target. This strategy is very challenging to counter for any intelligence or enforcement agency because it is impossible to know where the adversary is aiming to hit next.

The threat from within: Less than a fifth of the jihadist plots in Europe involved terrorists who had been fighters in Syria, and nearly two-thirds consisted of lone attackers who plotted to use unsophisticated weapons such as hammers, knives, or vehicles.¹² Most of the perpetrators planned and executed the acts in the countries where they lived (i.e., home-grown terrorists). This highlights the potential threat in the future, given that these perpetrators have prior knowledge of the area and infrastructure, as well as access to facilitators who provide essential logistical support. Communities of disaffected Muslims living in the West are fertile ground for ISIS. With a weaker central command, terror activity will likely be more decentralized as well, driven by local cells taking the reins and the initiative. As ISIS has weakened, it has urged its followers to carry out more lone-wolf attacks in their home countries, rather than to travel to conflict zones. Calls to action via social media have specified methods of attack against civilian targets that have been tested in the conflict zones. There have been unsophisticated terror activities in Europe undertaken by juveniles from low socio-economic backgrounds, suggesting that counterterrorism strategy cannot focus only on thwarting terror, but must also consider the deeper

social welfare issues in the communities that are prone to terrorist activity.

Terrorists do not operate alone. Facilitators often are aware of an attacker's plans and either tolerate or assist them. Although most carried out their attacks alone or in small groups, several people in their environment were aware of their plans and facilitated their efforts. Jihadists have been able to radicalize without raising suspicion and to prepare an attack while remaining undetected by intelligence and enforcement agencies. When it comes to facilitators, the involvement of relatives of the perpetrators in planning and executing attacks represents a lesson to be learned for the future. Intelligence coverage of relatives may be able to provide an early warning regarding terror plans, and interrogation of relatives can yield important information.

The crime-terror nexus: In most European countries, more than half of ISIS recruits have criminal pasts. The pools of potential perpetrators are mostly immigrant Muslim neighborhoods with high crime rates, and specifically juvenile Muslim petty criminals who are exposed to Islamic radicalization in their surroundings. They forsake their previous secular criminal activity in favor of jihad, employing their access to resources from the crime world. Interestingly, many of the perpetrators of the major attacks in 2015-16 did not appear in databases, and only a few of them had known ties to people who fought in Syria, though there are cases in which internet connections with jihadist combatants in Iraq or Syria influenced the perpetrators' decisions to resort to terrorism in their home countries. Moving forward, the steady and slow return of foreign fighters will upgrade the capabilities of the local pools. Their numbers could be enough to "professionalize" the local European jihadists and introduce them to advanced tactics and technology. EU member states reported that returnees to Europe may have combat and operational capability and be prone to extreme violence upon their return. They serve as role models and might be involved in recruiting and radicalizing others.¹³

The surveillance challenge: The use of the internet, media, and even computer games for communication between terrorists without the need for physical contact demands further examination and analysis. With the end of the caliphate dream, it is expected that ISIS will adopt a different trajectory, moving from overt insurgency into covert asymmetric warfare. Sleeper cell networks are a more slippery adversary and will be deployed systematically to undermine stability and discredit the states where they take refuge. Instead of using mainstream social networks such as Twitter or WhatsApp, ISIS activists will be pushed further into the darker corners of the web. These include private messaging applications like Telegram and more esoteric messaging applications that are not yet on a watch list.

Yet, there are also good news in the threat department. The loss of the caliphate, not just in terms of territory, has been a major blow to ISIS. The group has been exposed as more vulnerable, less “cool” to pledge allegiance to, and no longer considered a visible Islamic regional power that radical Muslims look up to.¹⁴ This also hurts its ability to recruit and to operate from a haven that also functioned as a command-and-control center for its international terrorist operations. ISIS’ ability to pull together a complex act of terrorism is impaired. Moreover, counterterrorism agencies around the world, and especially in Europe, are more adept to react to the challenge since the horrific terror attacks that took place in 2015. International cooperation improved in some dimensions and intelligence is shared more routinely, while internally, enforcement and legislation has become more aggressive. The numbers of attacks have decreased and non-Muslim countries, empirically speaking, are safer from jihadist terror.

The threat from ISIS to the West is still meaningful despite the setbacks it has suffered in the Levant. Now that ISIS does not seize territory, it will probably rely on spectacular terrorism to mobilize and radicalize Muslims around the world.¹⁵ This will increase its motivation to carry out high-profile

attacks, including more attacks on civil aviation or other transportation. Unfortunately, given these threats, not enough is being done at present to meet this challenge. ISIS represents a unique type of threat that has never been encountered before. The organization will continue to maneuver, govern, radicalize, and inspire its followers to carry out both *spontaneous and well-planned* attacks that challenge counterterrorism and intelligence agencies and threaten the stability of neighboring countries in the Middle East.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT IT?

The normal routine of national security decisionmaking is often replaced by the rush of crisis decisionmaking. While countries are grappling with terrorist challenges, they are more likely to ignore policy problems, the constant monitoring of new information, and long-term planning. Instead, periodic outbursts of energy are directed at coping with an imminent threat, a terror attack set in motion, or a lone wolf prowling the streets. This reactive approach takes precedence over a comprehensive plan that could manage terrorism challenges from end to end. Counterterrorism and security agencies have become quite comfortable operating in this mode and, to some extent, the complexities of international relations and the realities of domestic and bureaucratic politics make some version of this crisis management all but inevitable.¹⁶

Governments should resist this urge and instead adopt a comprehensive and long-term strategy that will prevent jihadist terrorism in different phases: from radicalization to thwarting a planned attack. Without a comprehensive strategy in place, chances are that governments will fall short.

In formulating their responses to the challenges presented by jihadist terror, Western governments should consider the strategic dimensions laid out below. In each focus area—including education, legislation, intelligence, enforcement, and defense—this report attempts not to prescribe a specific policy, but instead to give policymakers

the tools with which to identify the gaps in their countries' approaches to terrorism.

Education

Educational initiatives to combat terrorism concerns the West's ability to communicate with Islamic communities worldwide, establish a productive relationship with them, and encourage them to reject the current trend toward jihad. There needs to be a dialogue between societies that rises above the kind of Islamic rhetoric that ISIS is disseminating, which societies must expose for what it really is. Communities need to harness *the majority* of Islamic populations and encourage them to represent the true spirit of Islam worldwide. In recent years, jihadist terror has consumed the major part of law enforcement and intelligence resources—and rightly so, given the level of its threat. However, local authorities must make sure that this does not come at the expense of allocating resources of a different kind elsewhere.

For example, while many countries are adopting a “no return” policy for fighters and their families, this potentially creates a generation of stateless youth that resent the countries that rejected them. Thinking in the long term, governments must take social measures to mitigate the potential threat from returnee fighters and their families.

In addition, policymakers should pay attention to the potential process of radicalization in prisons.¹⁷ ISIS uses prisons as a place to reorganize, recruit, and recover. The mixed imprisonment of ISIS activists and common criminals might create a backlash once these inmates serve their sentences and rejoin society. The average prison sentence for terrorist offences in the EU in 2017 was five years, so putting away the terrorists is merely postponing the challenge.¹⁸

Furthermore, some children of ISIS fighters will be of fighting age by the time their parents may be released and could potentially add fresh blood to the organization, making rehabilitation and reintegration a critical ongoing process. While penal institutions

can serve as “universities of terrorism” they can also serve as hothouses for positive education. That said, education is about addressing *underlying* forces for violent radicalization in each country, above and beyond the attention that is being given to any military campaign.

In the Middle East, continuous civil conflicts have given rise to local extremist groups that provide basic security as well as law and order services to the local population in return for their support. The challenge includes governance and grassroots education, not only counterterrorist activity. The West must address these issues in the countries of origin such as Somalia, Mali, Yemen, Nigeria, and Iraq, and compete with jihadist groups at the community and local level by creating education establishments and providing security in rural and urban areas. As Katherine Zimmerman rightfully noted, “rather than focusing on terrorists and terrain, the U.S. and its partners should focus on breaking the bonds between Salafi-Jihadi groups and local communities.”¹⁹ Eroding jihadists' power over their communities and countries of origin would allow governments to deal with them as terrorists and not as a political local authority.²⁰

Legislation

Appropriate terrorism legislation should find the right balance between the spirit of democracy and the urgency of security. Even in democratic countries where personal freedoms are held sacred, the right to preserve life should prevail. Legislation must provide a solid backbone for the rapid and efficient use of intelligence in order to arrest and question potential terrorists, even in the absence of concrete criminal charges in some particular cases. The challenges posed by the “inside man” (e.g., a plane crew member recruited by a terrorist cell) are forcing Western countries to amend their legislation by enabling authorities and enforcement agencies to conduct interrogations, investigations, and surveillance in a more immediate and accessible manner. The tension between the maintenance of public safety on the one hand and protection of individual rights on the other has never been so fierce.

As foreign fighters try to make their way back home, including the well-publicized case of Muthana Hoda,²¹ the legal challenges of ISIS terrorism are on the rise. A major obstacle to coping with this challenge is that there remains no standard legal definition to what constitutes membership in ISIS. How active should an individual affiliated with ISIS be in order to be considered a terrorist? Besides those who actually engaged in combat, there are many who were active participants in the ISIS civilian apparatus. How should these individuals be dealt with legally once they reach Western shores? Should they be prosecuted for conducting “civil duties”? What about the children that were born in the caliphate? And those that volunteered at a young age and then backed down but were forced to stay?

These are all legal questions that must be addressed rapidly if decisionmakers do not want these issues to fester and grow. Therefore, legislators must react quickly to close legal loopholes that could be exploited by terrorists and facilitators. Confronting these cases requires more than interpreting implementing existing laws. As legal expert Benjamin Wittes has argued, this entails the crafting of new legal frameworks, rethinking questions of why authorities track, detain, interrogate, and arrest certain individuals, and under what authority.²² However, there are major potential pitfalls in crafting counterterrorism legislation. An administration incapable of taking quick and effective action may not be able to protect its citizens from a looming catastrophic terror attack. On the other hand, a government may use terrorism as a pretense to limit personal freedoms.

Deterrence is an important factor in legislation because in many cases, family members or close friends were aware of perpetrators’ intentions and did nothing to stop them or report them to the authorities. Even lone wolf terrorists need some assistance or behave irregularly before they take action. This concerning phase that they are experiencing should be reported by their inner

circle. Thus, taking measures against collaborators or facilitators of Jihadist groups can have a productive effect. Deterrence provides us with the ability to introduce other considerations into the potential perpetrator’s mind and take steps against terrorists’ surroundings, rather than just focusing on the individuals themselves. Specifically, it entails creating a legal framework that allows the prosecution of people who were aware of a looming terrorist attack but chose not to report it.

Intelligence

An effective intelligence network alerts to a planned by terrorist activity, whether carried out by networks, lone wolves, or local cells. Constant monitoring of social networks through technology and close international cooperation, based on common goals and shared watch-lists, may be of great value to this end. For example, Intelligence agencies must develop new indicators and sensors (whether from human or signals intelligence) for activity such as the purchase of pharmaceuticals, detergents, or any items that could be used to produce explosives. Although the majority of attacks in Europe in 2017-18 were executed with simpler means, explosives remain a preferred weapon for terrorists because of their ability to create mass casualties and media impact.²³ Disturbingly but not unexpectedly, on June 13, 2018, for the first time since the rise of ISIS, the German police arrested a 29-year-old Tunisian terrorist for producing ricin at home in preparation for a terror attack. Indications of a growing interest among jihadist terrorists in chemical and biological weapons was detected in 2017 via messages and tutorials sent to lone actors in Europe.

As terror organizations adapt their methods, they will become more efficient and clandestine in their communication. It is inevitable that they will recede to the darker corners of the internet and use more complex ways to communicate, while using languages that most Western intelligence agencies have not mastered. Early detection of their means and methods of communication will become vital for effective counter terrorism strategy. Traditional monitoring programs of telephone conversations

and text messages will not necessarily cover the communications between conspiring terrorists. Communication coverage, in this age of instant messaging and social networks, demands an ability to detect and intervene when certain legal conditions are met. For example, a step in the right direction would be the ability to seek information from a Google database, called Sensorvault, where a trove of detailed location records of hundreds of millions of devices worldwide is accessed by law enforcement agencies.²⁴

In the United States, there are questions about intelligence agencies' capabilities to fulfill their mandate effectively over time. The decision to forsake the 2015 Freedom Act, which allows the National Security Agency to analyze logs of Americans' domestic phone calls and text messages, will go into effect in December 2019.²⁵ This program traces its origins to the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks when the George W. Bush administration put in place a surveillance program involving the bulk collection of logs of Americans' domestic phone calls. While intelligence officials could not point to specific attacks the program had thwarted, they defended the initiative as a useful triaging tool for sifting through potential connections—and suggested that had it been in place before 9/11, it might have helped uncover al-Qaida's plot.

In managing the tension between privacy and security concerns, intelligence agencies face a dual problem of statistics and public memory. People have zero tolerance for terrorism—they cannot accept that it is unavoidable. When attacks do occur, however, their memory does not linger long enough in the public mind to propel the long-term changes needed to reduce the chances of another successful attack. Intelligence agencies are totally accountable for preventing these attacks, even when this memory fatigue has led the public's attention to prioritize other issues. The intelligence challenge is not about finding a needle in a haystack; it is more about knowing the difference between needles and straw. Jihadists

have learned their lesson many a time and they have upped their communication and stealth capabilities. To combat this, intelligence agencies must be *in* the haystack, with access to large databases, to detect irregularities and outliers. In order to grasp the irregular intelligence agencies must study the data have a solid understanding of what should be considered normal and not threatening. It is sensible to assume that with the rising capabilities to store, process, and analyze big data, in conjunction with machine learning and artificial intelligence technologies, intelligence and enforcement agencies will be able to make a more focused and effective use of comprehensive sources of data, and in a more balanced way in terms of personal freedoms.

Enforcement

Enforcement regards the ability to provide a rapid and effective response to an alert. Knowing about an alert is not enough, as law enforcement agencies are measured is how well they react to it. Counterterrorism enforcement demands solid *integration* between the entities, within and across countries required to make arrests, react to hostage scenarios, or manage a crisis effectively. On the tactical level, it requires professional SWAT teams, police, border control, immigration authorities, and mostly intelligence officers working in concert to stop an act of terrorism in motion. In the long term, there is the risk that professional agencies will succumb to counterterrorism exhaustion. The years since 2015 have been nothing but exhausting for enforcement agencies, which have seen their resources spread very thin as they try to meet a formidable challenge. Meanwhile, the jihadist strategy is about patience and surviving to fight another day. ISIS infrastructure and logistic support must be addressed on a regular basis even if the organization appears to be struggling. Compared to the other issues discussed in this paper, the challenge of enforcement is less esoteric, as the public has access to more information about it. Practically, enforcement is a main intersection point in the process of counter-terrorism. It is the heart of

the strategy and the intersection of the *where and how* all things fall into place and the name of the game is *integration*.

On the strategic level, enforcement also demands cooperation, sharing information, knowing your partners (i.e. sister agencies and foreign services), and a common understanding of how to cooperate to eradicate terrorist infrastructure on a regular basis. It is also about having the legal system, the rescue teams, the border control authorities, the local police forces and even the community leaders on board. This is a major challenge for various reasons. Agencies must manage the tension between cooperating with one another and protecting their respective sources and methods. Close, cooperative relationships, as essential and fruitful as they may be, cannot come at the expense of these strategic assets. They must also get the various actors involved to agree on the command-and-control model to be employed. How are the decisions made and who makes the call when mitigating an immediate risk to human life would come at the cost of a vital source? There is also a big difference between cooperating on a regular basis and cooperating in real time when an act of terror is imminent. Having the ability to direct all resources at one target, from different professional disciplines, different organizational cultures, disparate geographies, and separate means of communication is far from trivial and is a constant challenge in counterterrorism.

Defense

Defense is the last resort. It entails security systems, preventive methods, and advanced technologies, especially in airports, train stations, and mass gatherings. The high-profile presence of soldiers or police officers in sensitive locations can also be effective in denying the ability to achieve a large-scale terror attack. An escalating factor that is emerging in this context and demands higher attention is the serious challenge that ISIS poses to civil aviation security around the world.²⁶ In addition to organized, planned terror attacks, ISIS radicalizes individuals and has them carry out terror attacks,

which dramatically widens the circle of potential terrorists, for instance to aviation personnel such as mechanics, porters, and flight crews. This challenges the ability to collect the necessary intelligence to foil the attacks and ensure that air passenger and cargo traffic are safe. Every successful attack (and even a failed one) on an airport or plane causes damage that exceeds the loss of human life. The security of international airports is only as good as its weakest link. If security at one airport is weak, it poses a threat not only to itself but to international aviation. Addressing this problem successfully and reducing the threat to manageable proportions requires a tighter professional campaign based on international cooperation, supported by policymakers and backed by security agencies.

CONCLUSION

There is no single measure that can prevent an act of terrorism from taking place. On one hand, the objective is to reduce the possibility of an attack taking place, while on the other hand, it is also crucial to minimize the damage inflicted by any attack that is carried out. Therefore, the only world we can envision today is one in which terrorism can be contained rather than eradicated.

Some contend that that there will now be a chronic state of conflict defined by an ongoing, asymmetrical war of *attrition*, the full implications of which have yet to be seen. Be that as it may, decisionmakers and professionals must all rise to the challenge, be vigilant, and raise the guard.

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