

The Future of Counterterrorism: Addressing the Evolving Threat to Domestic Security.

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This testimony is organized into 8 sections

1. What is the terrorism threat to the U.S.?
2. What is the terrorism threat posed by citizens of proposed travel-ban countries?
3. An examination of attacks in the U.S. that are inspired or enabled by ISIS.

4. An assessment of who ISIS' American recruits are and why they sign up;
5. An assessment of how ISIS is doing;
6. An examination of what the big drivers of jihadist terrorism are;
7. A discussion of some future trends in terrorism;
8. Finally, what can be done to reduce the threat from jihadist terrorists?

1. What is the terrorism threat to the United States?

The ISIS attacks in Brussels last year and in Paris in 2015 underlined the threat posed by returning Western “foreign fighters” from the conflicts in Syria and Iraq who have been trained by ISIS or other jihadist groups there. Six of the attackers in Paris were European nationals who had trained with ISIS in Syria. Yet in the United States, the threat from returning foreign fighters is quite limited. According to FBI Director James Comey, 250 Americans have gone or attempted to go to Syria. This figure is far fewer than the estimated 6,900 who have traveled to Syria from Western nations as a whole — the vast majority from Europe. As many as 1,900 of those militants have returned, according to an estimate by the House Committee on Homeland Security.

At home, the United States has not faced any threats from ISIS-trained militants, but it does face a threat from extremists inspired by ISIS, or that are in some cases in direct communication with ISIS through encrypted communications. The homegrown terror threat poses a knotty, multi-layered problem for U.S. law enforcement. It's hard for the U.S. intelligence community to track lone wolves who are not communicating with foreign terrorist organizations via email or phone. Nor do lone wolves have meetings with co-conspirators of the type that can be monitored by the FBI, while domestic extremists who are in touch with ISIS using encrypted communications are using the type of encryption that cannot be easily decrypted.

The FBI said in 2016 that it was conducting some one thousand investigations of suspected Islamist militants; many of these will be dismissed, rightly, as not causes for true alarm, but the attack by Omar Mateen in Orlando that killed 49 reminds us that despite all these FBI investigations, sometimes America's homegrown terrorists will still slip through the net. **This will be ISIS' legacy in the United States: the crowdsourcing of jihad, so that men like Omar Mateen can quickly convert their personal grievances into what they believe is a righteous holy war.**

From court records and news reports New America identified 117 American militants who have traveled to Syria to join militant groups, attempted to travel to Syria to do so, or provided support for those who

did. Of those, 74 were arrested before reaching Syria. For example, Shannon Conley, a 19-year-old woman from Colorado, pleaded guilty in 2014 to conspiring to provide material support to ISIS. She never set foot in Syria, as she was arrested at the Denver International Airport.

43 did manage to reach Syria and join a militant group. Of those, 17 are dead. Douglas McAuthur McCain, for instance, a Muslim convert from California, was killed in 2014 fighting for ISIS in a battle against the Free Syrian Army. Recently unsealed court documents suggest that Adnan Fazeli, a 38-year-old man who settled in Maine after coming to the United States as a refugee from Iran, died fighting for ISIS in 2015 in a battle against the Lebanese army.

Only eight American militants returning from Syria have been arrested and only one is alleged to have plotted an attack in the United States. Court documents allege that Abdirahman Sheik Mohamud, a 23-year-old from Ohio, left to fight in Syria in April 2014 before returning to the United States two months later. After his return to the United States, he was monitored by an informant, leading to his arrest. Mohamud has pleaded not guilty to plotting an attack on a U.S. military base.

The United States is now a hard target for foreign terrorist organizations.

The United States today is a hard target for foreign terrorist organizations that have not carried out a successful attack in the States since 9/11. That is in part because of the defensive measures the States has taken. On 9/11, there were 16 people on the U.S. “no fly” list. By 2016 there were 81,000. In 2001, there were 35 Joint Terrorism Task Force “fusion centers,” where multiple law enforcement agencies worked together to chase down leads and build terrorism cases. A decade and a half later there were more than one hundred. Before 9/11, the Department of Homeland Security, National Counterterrorism Center and Transportation Security Administration (TSA) all did not exist. Annoying as it is for many Americans to go through a TSA checkpoint at an airport, it is a strong deterrent for terrorists inclined to smuggle any kind of weapon on board a plane. While it’s impossible to decisively measure the impact of programs designed to make attacks *not* happen, the relatively few successful jihadist terrorist attacks in the States in the years since 9/11 do seem indicative that, broadly speaking, American defensive measures are working.

Another important change: At the dawn of the 21st century, the American public didn’t comprehend the threat posed by jihadist terrorists. That changed dramatically after 9/11. In December 2001, the passengers on an American Airlines jet disabled the “shoe bomber,” Richard Reid, as the plane flew between Paris and Miami. Similarly, eight years later it was his fellow passengers who tackled the “underwear bomber” Umar

Abdulmutallab on Northwest Flight 253 as it flew over Detroit. And the following year it was a street vendor who spotted a suspicious SUV parked in Times Square that contained the bomb planted there by Pakistani Taliban recruit, Faisal Shahzad. The public's awareness of terrorism as a domestic threat is a significant force multiplier to the other measures put in place to defend the "homeland" after 9/11.

Aiding those defensive measures is the U.S.'s offense overseas. In 2013, the United States allocated \$72 billion to intelligence collection and other covert activities. Before 9/11, the budget was around a third of that figure: \$26 billion. CIA drones may be controversial, but they also did significant damage to al-Qaeda in Pakistan and in Yemen killing dozens of the group's leaders. While it's impossible to decisively measure the impact of programs designed to make attacks *not* happen, neither branch of al-Qaeda was able to launch a successful attack on the States after 9/11 in part because of the pressure that the drone program put them under.

The threat from al-Qaeda, ISIS and similar groups has receded significantly from its high point on 9/11. The threat inside the States is lone-wolf attacks such as the attack in Orlando in June 2016. As described above, in the past decade and a half 94 Americans have been killed in the United States by jihadist terrorists. Shocking and tragic as these attacks have been, they still pale in comparison to al-Qaeda's murder of almost three thousand people on the morning of 9/11.

Other Forms of Political Violence.

Political violence has long been a feature of American life. In the 1970s leftist groups such as the Weather Underground and the Black Panthers conducted a number of terrorist attacks. In 1995 two men animated by extreme right-wing beliefs conducted what was then the most lethal terrorist attack on America soil in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people. **Since 9/11, according to New America's research, in addition to the 94 people killed by jihadist terrorists, terrorists motivated by extreme right-wing beliefs killed 50 people, while 5 were killed by a militant black separatist.**

Since this hearing is about threats to domestic security focusing only on jihadist terrorism would miss other threats, particularly in an era of increased polarization.

In November, for instance a story circulated on several websites that Hillary Clinton and her campaign manager John Podesta were running a child sex ring out the basement of the Comet Ping Pong pizza joint in northwest Washington DC. This patently absurd story prompted 28-year-old Edgar Welch of Salisbury, North Carolina to travel to Washington to "self-investigate." On December 5 Welch walked into the popular pizza restaurant carrying an assault rifle and started firing shots. He pointed the firearm in

the direction of a restaurant employee who fled and notified police who arrested Welch. Welch told investigators that he had come armed to help rescue the children and he also told a reporter with masterful understatement “the intel on this wasn’t 100 percent.”^{1a}

Weapons of Mass Destruction and Terrorists in the States.

Despite all the hysterical commentary about the issue, in the decade and a half since 9/11 jihadist terrorists in the States have not developed, acquired or deployed chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) weapons. This is a striking finding that is worth underlining: Of the 399 cases of jihadist terrorism in the States examined by New America, not one involved CBRN. **Chemical and biological weapons and their precursors, however, were either developed or deployed over the past decade and half in the States by 13 far-right militants, one leftist militant and two with idiosyncratic motives, such as Bruce Ivins who launched the anthrax attacks in Washington and New York in the months after 9/11.**

2. Do citizens of countries targeted by the proposed temporary travel ban pose a threat to the United States?

On January 27 President Donald Trump signed an executive order instituting a temporary travel ban on foreign nationals traveling from seven majority-Muslim countries – Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. New America has collected data on 399 individuals accused of jihadist terrorism-related crimes since 9/11. **That research shows that of the 94 people killed by jihadist terrorists inside the United States since 9/11, not a single death would have been prevented by the travel ban. Far from being foreign infiltrators, the large majority of jihadist terrorists in the United States are American citizens or legal residents. Almost half were born American citizens. No deadly attacker since 9/11 emigrated from one of the countries listed under the travel ban. Nor did any of the 9/11 hijackers come from one of the travel ban countries. Nor did any of the deadly post-9/11 terrorists come from a family that had emigrated from one of the travel ban countries.**

The proposed travel ban is akin to saying that because the United States has a significant problem with gangs that have their roots in Central America, therefore it should ban travel from Argentina and Chile.

Of the twelve lethal jihadist terrorists in the United States since 9/11:

- Three, Carlos Bledsoe, Alton Nolen, and Ali Muhammad Brown are African-Americans born in the United States, and Bledsoe can trace his family’s U.S. military service back to the Civil War.
- Three, Syed Rizwan Farook, Tashfeen Malik, and Naveed Haq are from families that hailed originally from Pakistan. Farook and Haq were born in the United States while Malik entered on a K-1 Spouse Visa and later becoming a legal permanent resident.

- One, Nidal Hasan, is from a family that came from the Palestinian Territories and was born in the United States. His parents had immigrated to the United States during the 1960s.
- Two, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, came from Russia as children. Dzhokhar became a naturalized citizen while Tamerlan was a permanent resident.
- One, Hesham Hadayet, emigrated from Egypt and conducted his attack a decade after coming to the United States. Hadayet was a permanent resident.
- One, Mohammed Abdulazeez, was born in Kuwait to Palestinian-Jordanian parents and became a naturalized citizen.
- One, Omar Mateen, is from an Afghan family and was born in the United States.

Of 15 individuals who have conducted non-lethal terrorist attacks inside the United States since 9/11, only three came from countries covered by the travel ban. However, in two of those cases, the individual entered the United States as a child.

-On March 3, 2006 Mohammed Reza Taheri-Azar, a naturalized citizen from Iran, drove a car into a group of students at the University of North Carolina, injuring nine people. However, Taheri-Azar, though born in Iran, came to the United States at the age of two. As a result his radicalization was homegrown inside the United States.

-On September 17, 2016 Dahir Adan, a 20-year-old naturalized citizen from Somalia, injured ten people while wielding a knife at a mall in Minnesota. However, like Taheri-Azar, Adan had come to the United States as a young child.

-On November 28, 2016 Abdul Razak Ali, an 18-year-old legal permanent resident who came to the United States as a refugee from Somalia in 2014 -- having left Somalia for Pakistan in 2007 -- injured eleven people when he rammed a car into a group of his fellow students on the campus of Ohio State University and then attacked them with a knife. However, it is not clear that the attack provides support for Trump's travel ban. Artan left Somalia as a pre-teen, and if he was radicalized abroad, it most likely occurred while in Pakistan, which is not included on the travel ban. Furthermore, it is far from clear that Artan radicalized abroad rather than inside the United States. In a Facebook posting prior to his attack, he cited Anwar al-Awlaki, the Yemeni-American cleric born in the United States, whose work has helped radicalize a wide range of extremists in the United States including those born in the United States.

Syrian refugees settling in the States are not terrorists

On January 27 President Trump also signed the executive order that aimed to suspend the entry of Syrian refugees into the United States indefinitely. As he signed the order, President Trump said that this was "to keep radical Islamic terrorists out of the United States." **This order will achieve**

absolutely nothing because there is no evidence of terrorists among the Syrian refugees who are settling in the United States. That shouldn't be too surprising, because the United States has accepted only a minuscule number of Syrian refugees, even though the Syrian civil war is one of the worst humanitarian crises since World War II and has generated a vast outflow of nearly 5 million refugees from Syria. **The United States has taken only around 15,000 Syrian refugees, amounting to a tiny 0.2% of the total number of refugees, the large majority of whom are women and children.**

Not only are these Syrian refugees not terrorists, but they are fleeing the brutal state terrorism of the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad and the brutal non-state terrorism of ISIS. **The Syrian refugees entering the States are the victims of terrorism, not the perpetrators of terrorism.**

Also, any ISIS terrorist with an ounce of common sense is quite unlikely to try to infiltrate the United States as a Syrian refugee. Anne Richard, a senior US State Department official, testified at a Senate Homeland Security Committee hearing in November 2015 that any Syrian refugee trying to get into the United States is scrutinized by officials from the National Counterterrorism Center, FBI, Department of Homeland Security, State Department and Pentagon. They must also give up their biometric data — scans of their retinas, for instance — submit their detailed biographic histories and submit to lengthy interviews. These refugees are also queried against a number of government databases to see if they might pose a threat — and the whole process takes two years, sometimes more. Leon Rodriguez, the director of US Citizenship and Immigration Services, who also testified at the November 2015 hearing, said that of all the tens of millions of people who are trying to get into the United States every year, “Refugees get the most scrutiny and Syrian refugees get the most scrutiny of all.”

By contrast, Syrian refugees fleeing to Europe do not go through anything like the rigorous process experienced by those who are coming to the States, and the volume of Syrians fleeing to Europe is orders of magnitude larger than it is to the United States.

The Trump administration's own data on anti-Western terror attacks undermines the case for the travel ban.

Earlier this month with great fanfare the White House released a list of 78 terrorist attacks around the world since September 2014. A White House official described them as “major terrorist attacks targeting the West.” The list was released after President Trump's claim that the media is not paying enough attention to terrorist attacks, a contention that is false. In fact, with a search of the Nexis media database I found more than 80,000 stories about the purportedly under-covered 78 terrorist attacks, an average of 1,000 stories per attack.

The White House's own terrorism list underlines the arbitrary nature of the proposed travel ban because, by the White House's own account, the countries that are generating the most significant number of terrorists threatening the West are from the West. The list also underlines the fact

that it is American citizens who largely foment terrorism in the United States. This is also the case in countries such as France and Belgium, where it is French and Belgian citizens who are most often the ones conducting significant acts of terrorism.

Conspicuous by their absence on the White House list of terrorists carrying out major attacks against Western targets were Iraqis, Somalis, Sudanese and Yemenis, who are from four of the seven Muslim countries that the Trump administration is seeking to suspend travel from.

Of the total of 90 terrorists on the White House list, at most 9 are from travel ban countries. Indeed, 50 of the terrorists — more than half — are from Christian-majority countries in the West. On the list, which includes the identities of attackers where they are known, France leads the way with 16 French terrorists, followed by the United States with 13 American terrorists, 11 of whom are US citizens and two of whom are legal permanent residents.

Of these 29 American and French terrorists, only two even have family origins in travel ban countries and they are both from Somalia. Belgium comes in third place with seven terrorists.

In descending order after that are:

- Tunisians (6),
- Libyans and Bangladeshis are tied with 5,
- Saudis (4),
- Syrians, Algerians and Indonesians are tied with 3 each;
- Afghans, Australians, Bosnians, Canadians, Danes, Germans, Russians and Turks are tied with two each and
- One each from Chad, Egypt, the Emirates, Iran, Morocco, the Palestinian Territories, Pakistan, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

3. ISIS-inspired and ISIS-enabled attacks in the States

Attacks Inspired by ISIS

In the past two and half years, there have been eight ISIS-inspired attacks in the United States. The most lethal was in Orlando in June 2016 when Omar Mateen killed 49 people at a nightclub catering to the gay community; it was the deadliest terrorist attack in the States since 9/11. In December 2015 a married couple in San Bernardino, California attacked an office holiday party and killed 14.

There have been other ISIS-inspired attacks that were not lethal. In the fall of 2014, 32-year-old Zale Thompson attacked police officers with a hatchet in New York. Described as an unemployed recluse, Thompson is believed to have been inspired by ISIS. In May 2015, gunmen inspired by ISIS opened fire at a cartoon contest of the Prophet Mohammed held in Garland, Texas. The gunmen, Elton Simpson and Nadir Soofi, were killed by police before they could kill anyone. In January 2016, Edward Archer shot Philadelphia

police officer Jesse Hartnett. Archer told police, “I pledge my allegiance to the Islamic State, and that’s why I did what I did.”

As mentioned above, on September 17, 2016 Dahir Adan, a 20-year-old naturalized citizen from Somalia, injured ten people while wielding a knife at a mall in Minnesota and two months later Abdul Razak Ali Artan, an 18-year-old legal permanent resident of Somali origin injured eleven people in an attack at Ohio State. Both attackers were inspired by ISIS.

Unstable Individuals Adopted by ISIS

Unstable individuals will sometimes carry out attacks with only the thinnest veneer of jihadist justification and the attack will be quickly adopted by ISIS, even though ISIS had no connection to the plot at all. In late August 2016, 20-year-old Wasil Farooqui of Roanoke County, Virginia--who had reportedly traveled to Turkey in an apparent effort to then cross the border and possibly join ISIS in Syria--allegedly repeatedly stabbed a randomly selected man and woman in Roanoke with a knife, yelling “Allahu Akbar!” as he did so, severely injuring them. The case is complicated by the fact that Farooqui told a detective he was hearing voices telling him that he was stupid and to attack someone, which raises the issue of the extent to which some “ISIS” attacks are even really “terrorism” in any meaningful sense.

This certainly seems to be the case of 31-year-old Tunisian Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel who so frightened his own family with his violent personality that he was prescribed antipsychotic drugs when he was a teenager. Bouhlel never attended his neighborhood mosque, smoked pot, drank heavily, ate pork, chased women, and had had a number of run-ins with the law for violence. He also beat his wife who then divorced him. Bouhlel was so incensed by his wife leaving him that he defecated in their apartment. Bouhlel, in short, was a violent loser who may have been on the edge of psychosis.

During Bastille Day celebrations on July 14, 2016, Bouhlel killed 84 in Nice, France using a large truck as a weapon. ISIS’ overseer of operations in the West, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani had called for attacks using vehicles as weapons two years earlier. After Bouhlel’s massacre, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls astutely observed that ISIS “gives unstable individuals an ideological kit that allows them to make sense of their acts.” This echoed the conclusions of leading American forensic psychologist Reid Meloy, who together with his British colleague Jessica Yakeley published a 2014 study of terrorists with no connections to formal terrorist organizations.

Meloy, who works as a consultant with the FBI’s behavioral analysts, framed the initial stage leading to violence as “grievance,” and his explanation of what that meant is worth quoting at length, as it nicely summarizes Bouhlel’s rancor. According to Meloy, the pathway begins with “an event or series of

events that involve loss and often humiliation of the subject, his or her continual rumination about the loss, and the blaming of others. Most people with grievances *eventually grieve their loss*, but for those unwilling or unable to do so, often the most narcissistically sensitive individuals, it is much easier to convert their shame into rage toward the object which they believe is the cause of all their suffering. Such intense grievances require that individuals take no personal responsibility for their failures in life . . . they are ‘injustice collectors.’”

What follows this stage, Meloy explains, is “moral outrage”: “He embeds his personal grievance in an historical, religious, or political cause or event. The suffering of others, which may be misperceived or actual, provides emotional fuel for his personal grievance.” Personal grievance and moral outrage are then “framed by an ideology.” The nature of the ideology is secondary; its function is to allow the perpetrator some justification for the violent act he is planning. Meloy explained, “Upon closer examination, these conscious belief systems are quite superficial; subjects will cherry pick phrases from the relevant authoritative text to justify their desire to kill others . . . This framing is absolutist and simplistic, providing a clarity that both rationalizes behavior and masks other, more personal grievances.”

A Case Study: The Orlando Terrorist

This is also a good description of how the Orlando terrorist, Omar Mateen, took his personal grievances and framed them around the ideology of ISIS so that he was no longer the disappointed wannabe cop in a dead end job that he actually was, but by pledging himself to ISIS as he carried out his massacre he was now a heroic holy warrior.

The attack in Orlando fit a grim pattern: Every lethal jihadist terrorist attack in the United States in the past decade and a half has been carried out by American citizens or legal permanent residents, operating either as lone wolves or in pairs, who have no formal connections or training from terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda or ISIS. Because 19 Arab, foreign-born terrorists, carried out 9/11 many Americans may think that terrorist attacks in the United States are carried out by foreigners, rather than by U.S. citizens, but Omar Mateen was an American citizen who was born in New York to parents who immigrated to the United States from Afghanistan.

Mateen is similar to other jihadist terrorists in the States since 9/11. According to research by New America, there have been more than 350 jihadist terrorism cases in the United States since the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. The militants are overwhelmingly American citizens or legal residents; around 84%. The perpetrators are not the young hotheads of popular imagination. The individuals in these cases have an average age of 29, a third are married and a third have children. In many ways, they are ordinary Americans. Mateen was 29 when he carried out the attack, had been married twice and had a three-year-old son. He was

steadily employed as a security guard at a local golf resort. He had no criminal convictions, and there is no evidence he suffered from mental illness.

In his case, as in so many others of the 399 Americans charged since 9/11 with some act of jihadist terrorism—ranging from material support of a terrorist group to murder---the easy explanations—that jihadists in the United States are “mad” or “bad”—are not supported by the evidence. According to research by New America, the rate of mental illness for those Americans who have been charged or convicted for some kind of jihadist crime --about 11% --is below the rate of the general population, while their incarceration rate is similar to the incarceration rate of the general population of adult males; around ten per cent of American males spend time in prison.

Even in the cases of the dozen perpetrators who carried out the ten lethal jihadist terrorist attacks in the United States since 9/11 only three of the terrorists had a history of mental illness; Naveed Azfal Haq who killed a woman at the Jewish Federation building in Seattle in 2006 and Muhammad Youssef Abdulazeez who killed four Marines and a sailor at two [military installations](#) in [Chattanooga, Tennessee](#) in 2015. In August 2016, a judge ruled that Alton Nolen, who beheaded a coworker in Oklahoma in September 2014, was not competent to plead guilty after hearing testimony from mental health experts.

Of course, killing strangers in the service of jihadist ideology isn't “normal,” but the large majority of the twelve jihadist terrorists in the States since 9/11 who have carried out lethal attacks were not suffering from a mental illness when they carried out their assaults.

The National Institute of Mental Health says that around one in five Americans have some kind of mental illness in any given year. The sample size of 12 lethal jihadist terrorists in the States since 9/11 is a very small one, but their rate of mental illness—one in five---is that of the general population. (By contrast, a 2013 study of 119 individuals who carried out or planned to carry out acts of lone-actor terrorism either in the United States or in Europe since 1990—motivated by a wide range of political beliefs including jihadism, neo-Nazism, anti-government extremism and those with idiosyncratic ideologies---found that a third had a history of mental illness or personality disorders.)

For the book *United States of Jihad: Investigating America's Homegrown Terrorists*, I reviewed court records in hundreds of terrorism cases and spoke to family members and friends of terrorists, as well as to some of the militants themselves. I found that American jihadists are generally motivated by a mix of factors, including dislike of U.S. foreign policy in the Muslim world; a “cognitive opening” to militant Islam, often precipitated by a personal disappointment or loss; and the desire to attach themselves to an ideology or organization that could give them a sense of purpose. For many, embracing the ideology of Osama bin

Laden or ISIS allowed them to become the heroes of their own story as well as actors in a cosmic crusade.

For each individual terrorist the proportion of these motivations varied. For instance, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the older of the two brothers who carried out the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, was a non-practicing Muslim who became an Islamist militant once his [dreams of becoming an Olympic boxer](#) faded. At the time of the attack, he was unemployed. For him, bombing the marathon seemed to allow him to become the heroic figure that he believed himself to be. On the other hand, his younger brother, Dzhokhar, [never seemed to embrace militant Islam](#). He smoked marijuana, drank and chased girls — hardly the actions of a Muslim fundamentalist. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev’s motivations for the bombings were instead largely molded by his older brother, whom he admired and feared, and by his own half-baked opposition to American foreign policy.

Nidal Hasan, the Army major, who killed 13 people at Fort Hood, Tex., in 2009, seemed to be more of an ideologue. He was a highly observant Muslim who [objected to American foreign policy](#). But according to Nader Hasan, a first cousin who had grown up with him, the massacre at Fort Hood was also motivated by Nidal Hasan’s personal problems. He was unmarried, his parents were dead, he had no real friends and a dreaded deployment to Afghanistan loomed. “He went postal,” Nader Hasan explained, “and he called it Islam.”

These stories underline how hard it is to satisfactorily answer the question of why terrorists commit heinous crimes. Human motivations are complex. As the philosopher Immanuel Kant observed, “From the crooked timber of humanity not a straight thing was ever made.” It’s a useful reminder that human beings, including terrorists, often defy neat categorization.

Omar Mateen’s motivations, too, seem to have been multilayered, and will probably never be fully explicable. Mateen himself offered one inspiration: ISIS. In a 911 call he made from the nightclub as he was carrying out his massacre, Mateen pledged himself to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Yet a more complex stew of personal traits, resentments, and obsessions also propelled him towards violence. As a child Mateen was angry and disruptive in class, and at age 14 he was expelled from high school for fighting. On the morning of the 9/11 attacks, Mateen told classmates that Osama bin Laden was his uncle.

As an adult, relatives say Mateen expressed homophobic views, while coworkers remember that he claimed to have connections to both al-Qaeda and Hezbollah, groups that are at war with each other. His first wife says he was abusive and couldn’t control his temper, while there are suggestions that he might have been confused about his sexual identity. Mateen’s reported use of gay dating apps and visits to the Pulse nightclub in the months before

the attack make this a tempting central narrative—self-loathing for his own homosexuality turned violent—but these behaviors are also consistent with the careful planning of predatory murderers. In the weeks after the massacre FBI investigators concluded that there was no evidence Mateen had had a gay relationship.

Mateen was certainly, however, a man whose dreams had faded. He desperately wanted to be a cop and took selfies wearing New York Police Department shirts, but he was dismissed from a Florida police-training academy in 2007 because he threatened to bring a gun to campus and was falling asleep in class. Eight years later, in 2015, Mateen tried once again to become a police officer, applying to the police academy at Indian River State College in Fort Pierce. He was turned down because he admitted to using marijuana in the past and also because of what the college termed “discrepancies” in his application form.

Mateen’s grievances festered. Three weeks before his attack, one of the leaders of ISIS publicly urged that sympathizers of the group should carry out attacks in the West during the coming holy month of Ramadan. By following this directive, carrying out an attack as a self-styled “Islamic fighter” pledging allegiance to ISIS, Mateen was finally the heroic holy warrior that he believed himself to be. A day after the massacre ISIS’s official radio station, Al-Bayan, claimed him as one of the “soldiers of the caliphate in America.” But Mateen’s connection to ISIS was only aspirational; he wasn’t trained, directed or financed by the group. Instead he was, like every other jihadist in the States since 9/11 that has carried out a lethal attack, operating as a self-radicalized “lone wolf.”

Attacks Enabled by ISIS

Militants inspired by ISIS can reach out directly to members of ISIS in Syria over encrypted social media platforms seeking some kind of specific directions for an attack. This creates a “blended” plot that is both inspired and directed by ISIS. In FBI terminology this is an “enabled” ISIS attack. We already saw a harbinger of this in May 2015 when one of the two ISIS-inspired American militants who attacked the Prophet Mohammed cartoon contest in Garland, Texas, sent more than 100 encrypted messages to a terrorist overseas, according to the FBI.

4. Who are ISIS’ American recruits?

There are 117 individuals in the United States that New America has identified in public records or news accounts that have tried to join militant groups in Syria such as ISIS or the al-Qaeda affiliated Nusra Front, or have succeeded in joining such groups, or have helped others to join such groups.

They hail from across the United States and from a wide range of ethnic groups, which underscores the difficulty that law enforcement has in tracking them. They are relatively young; some are even teenagers. Given the fact that groups like ISIS have scant roles for women outside the home, women are surprisingly well represented. These militants are also quite active on social media. This is something of a boon for law enforcement, as many of these militants are prolific posters on publicly available social media, which it is perfectly legal for the FBI and police departments to monitor.

The 117 are residents of 23 states: Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin. There is no single ethnic profile for these militants: They are white, African-American, Somali-American, Vietnamese-American, Bosnian-American and Arab-American, among other ethnicities and nationalities.

An unprecedented number of American women are involved in the Syrian jihad compared to other such jihads in the past. One in nine of the 117 Americans involved in Syria-related militant activity are women. Women were rarely present, if at all, among jihadists in previous "holy wars" -- in Afghanistan against the Soviets in the 1980s, in Bosnia against the Serbs in the 1990s, and the initial insurgency in Iraq against the U.S.-led occupation more than a decade ago.

They're relatively young. Almost a fifth are teenagers -- including six teenage girls, the youngest of whom is 15. New America found that the average age of the militants is 25.

The only profile that ties together American militants drawn to the Syrian conflict is that they are active in online jihadist circles. 88 of the 117 individuals showed a pattern of often downloading and sharing jihadist propaganda online and, in a smaller number of cases, carrying on online conversations with militants abroad. Militants in the United States today become radicalized after reading and interacting with propaganda online and many have little or no physical interaction with other extremists.

Social media has dramatically accelerated this trend. Of the 117 individual cases that New America examined, there were no clear cases of physical recruitment by a militant operative, radical cleric or returning fighter from Syria. Instead, people self-recruited online or were sometimes in touch via Twitter with members of ISIS they had never met in person.

A representative case is that of 19-year-old Mohammed Hamzah Khan of suburban Chicago. In the late summer of 2014, he purchased three airline tickets for flights from Chicago to Istanbul for himself and his 17-year-old sister and 16-year-old brother (who have not been named publicly because they were minors). Khan had met someone online who had provided him with the number of a contact to call once he had landed in Istanbul who would help to get him and his siblings to the Turkish-Syrian border, and from there on to a region occupied by ISIS. Khan planned to serve in the group's police force. Before leaving, Khan wrote a three-page letter to his parents explaining why he was leaving Chicago to join ISIS. He told them that ISIS had established the perfect Islamic state and that he felt obligated to "migrate" there.

According to prosecutors, the three teenagers planned to meet up in Turkey with a shadowy ISIS recruiter they had met online, known as Abu Qa'qa, and travel with him, most likely to ISIS headquarters in Raqqa, Syria. They didn't make it. FBI agents arrested Khan and his two siblings at O'Hare Airport in October 2014.

There is no evidence that Khan planned to commit any act of terrorism in the United States or elsewhere, and he failed in his goal of reaching ISIS, but he faced up to 15 years in prison for attempting to provide "material support" to ISIS in the form of his own potential "services." He has pled guilty and federal prosecutors have argued for a five-year sentence in which he must continue to cooperate with them.

How Does ISIS Crowd Source Jihad in the States?

As FBI director James Comey noted when referring to the 2013 arrest of Terry Loewen, who was accused of plotting an attack on the Wichita airport in Kansas, "We have made it so hard for people to get into this country, bad guys, but they can enter as a photon and radicalize somebody in Wichita, Kansas." The "photon" Comey was talking about was, of course, the Internet. The only profile that tied together American militants drawn to the Syrian conflict is that they were active in online jihadist circles. More than three quarters were posters of jihadist material on Twitter or Facebook, or were in direct contact with ISIS recruiters over social media.

This raises the question of how we should conceptualize lone wolves in the age of social media. A militant radicalizing in front of his or her computer by himself at home is now not really alone. He/she is swimming in a virtual sea of jihadist recruiters, cheerleaders, and fellow travelers who are available for interaction with him or her 24/7. Contrast this with a classic lone-wolf American terrorist of the past such as the Unabomber, Ted Kaczynski, who mailed his targets more than a dozen bombs between the late 1970s and the mid-1990s that killed three people and injured some two dozen others, all in service of his obscure, Luddite beliefs. Kaczynski did this entirely by himself while living like a hermit in a

remote cabin in Montana with—forget the Internet—no electricity.

Today's lone wolf is instead plugged into a vast self-referential and interactive ecosystem where he or she can virtually, instantly find thousands of other people around the world who share his or her beliefs. Take the case of Alex, a twenty- three-year-old sometime Sunday school teacher living in a remote part of Washington State who converted to Islam. In 2015 multiple members and fans of ISIS spent thousands of hours online with her, promising that they would find her a suitable husband and even sending her gifts of chocolate and books about Islam. The three teenage Khan siblings from Chicago were in regular contact with virtual recruiters in Turkey and Syria and militants in the United Kingdom before attempting their emigration to the caliphate in 2014. **In the useful formulation of the Israeli counterterrorism expert Gabriel Weimann, the lone wolf is now part of a virtual pack.**

No amount of fiddling with visa regimes will alter the central fact that today's jihadist terrorists in the United States are largely radicalized online while they are living in the States. A travel ban is not going to stop the Internet.

The Continuing Influence of Anwar al-Awlaki

Lost in the intense coverage of the ISIS-inspired threat in the States is the continuing influence of the American-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki whose sermons and writings about the importance of jihad have appeared in 98 jihadist terrorism cases since 9/11, according to New America's research. Awlaki was killed in a drone strike in Yemen in 2011, but **killing the man turned out to be easier than killing his ideas; since his death Awlaki's writings and videos have turned up in 58 terrorism cases in the United States.**

5. ISIS in Retreat

ISIS has [lost](#) just under half the territory it once controlled in Iraq and around a fifth of what it had controlled in Syria. In the past year ISIS has lost the key Iraqi cities of Baiji, Fallujah, Ramadi and Tikrit, as well as Palmyra in Syria. In August 2016 ISIS lost the city of [Manbij](#), in northern Syria, a significant victory because it controls key routes to ISIS' de facto Syrian capital, Raqqa. ISIS fighters disobeyed orders to fight to the death to hold Manbij and fled. The same month the Turkish army crossed the border and seized the Syrian city of Jarablus.

In August 2016 Lt. Gen. Sean MacFarland, who was leading the anti-ISIS campaign at the time, said 45,000 ISIS fighters had been killed so far by the US-led coalition. "We estimate that over the past 11 months, we've killed about 25,000 enemy fighters. When you add that to the 20,000 estimated killed (previously), that's 45,000 enemy (fighters) taken off the battlefield."

That's an astonishing amount of attrition for a force MacFarland estimates had a remaining strength of 15,000 to 30,000 fighters.

U.S. intelligence estimates the US-led coalition has also killed at least 135 of ISIS leaders and significant officials, including in late August Mohammad al-Adnani, who oversaw the group's terrorist operations in the West. The U.S. military has also stepped up the air campaign against ISIS' wealth, for instance, [bombing a bank](#) in Iraq in January 2016 in which ISIS had stored millions in cash. U.S. bombers have also [repeatedly struck](#) trucks carrying oil that ISIS has extracted from oil fields in the shrinking area it now controls. These attacks on ISIS' cash supply and revenue streams have had real effects on ISIS' bottom line. ISIS has had to halve the salaries of its foot soldiers, according to documents that leaked from the terrorist army in 2016.

These massive losses of territory and income have had a very damaging effect on ISIS' central claims; that it has created a real caliphate that controls large amounts of territory and that it functions like a normal state. As the caliphate withers so too does its appeal to "foreign fighters" from around the Muslim world. This is a key to undermining ISIS as the foreign fighters are often the most ideological of the organization's cadre and, as the coalition continues to kill on average 2,000 ISIS fighters a month, the terrorist army is finding it harder and harder to replenish its ranks, an indicator of which is that it is increasingly resorting to using children as suicide attackers. In April 2016 the Pentagon said that the flow of foreign fighters joining ISIS had dropped from roughly 1,500 a month down to 200 within the past year.

Meanwhile, the flow of Americans going to join ISIS or attempting to do so has slowed to a trickle from an average of six to one a month, according to US intelligence estimates. Balanced against all this, of course, is the fact that the terrorist group has launched attacks or inspired them in places as disparate as Baghdad, Brussels, Istanbul, Kabul, Nice, Orlando and Paris in the past year and half. The terrorism research group, IntelCenter, also counts 43 ISIS affiliates of various kinds around the world. Some have declared their "support" for ISIS, while others have declared their "allegiance." Some of these affiliates may have simply slapped on the ISIS patch, but others clearly have some real connection with the ISIS core, such as the ISIS affiliate in Libya, which is the affiliate that is most tightly bound to the ISIS core.

That said, ISIS core continues to suffer reverse after reverse on the battlefield, while ISIS in Libya has suffered similar battlefield reverses to that of ISIS' core, losing control of the key coastal city of Sirte in Libya in August 2016, which had served as the group's key hub in Libya.

The Continued Resilience of al-Qaeda

A decade and half after 9/11 al-Qaeda has shown surprising resiliency despite the heavy losses it has sustained, including of its founder Osama bin Laden as well as dozens of other al-Qaeda leaders killed in CIA drones strikes in Pakistan and Yemen. While al-Qaeda has shown scant ability to attack in the West-- the last successful terrorist attack it directed in the West was the suicide bombings on London's transportation system in 2005 that killed more than 50 commuters--its regional affiliates remain quite capable of sustained attacks in their respective regions. Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb all retain capacity for sustained local attacks. Meanwhile the Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda's capable Syrian affiliate, claimed in July 2016 that it was separating from al Qaeda. Then-Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, said that Nusra likely announced its divorce from al-Qaeda's core for tactical reasons and the split was only cosmetic in nature.

Al-Qaeda is grooming one of bin Laden's sons, Hamza, to be a next generation leader of the group. Hamza, in his mid-20s, has long been an al-Qaeda true believer. He has appeared in a number of videos and audio messages that were released by al-Qaeda in the past year or so.

Omar Abdel-Rahman, the Egyptian cleric who inspired terrorist plots in New York during the early 1990s and who died in an American prison last week, was also the spiritual guide of key 9/11 plotters. Rahman's death in an American jail will almost certainly spark calls from al-Qaeda's current leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, for further anti-American attacks.

6. The Drivers of Global Jihadism

At the macro level, ISIS is not itself the problem — though it certainly amplifies existing problems — but rather is the symptom of five major problems that are driving jihadist terrorism around the globe and will continue to do so even when ISIS is largely defeated.

1. The regional civil war in the Middle East between the Sunni and the Shia that engulfed first Iraq, then Syria and now Yemen. That regional civil war is being driven by a variety of factors including the failure of the largely Shia Iraqi government to give Sunnis a real place at the table and the brutal civil war that the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad is waging on his largely Sunni population. Also in the mix is the role that Iran and the Gulf states have played in fighting each other in Syria through proxy forces such as the Sunni militant groups that are supported by the Gulf States and the Shia militias that are supported by Iran.

This regional sectarian war was amplified by Saudi Arabia's invasion of

Yemen in the spring of 2015 to fight what they believe to be Iranian-backed Houthis who had recently seized control of the Yemeni capital.

The civil war across the Middle East between the Shia and the Sunni empowers groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda who claim to be the defenders of Sunni rights against Shia attack. Until there is real political accommodation between the Sunnis and the Shia in countries such as Iraq, Syria and Yemen and some kind of rapprochement between the mortal enemies of Iran and Saudi Arabia, these sectarian wars will grind on. Don't, however, expect such an accommodation in the short- or medium-term. The Syrian civil war is already in its sixth year and the principal players in the conflict both inside Syria and outside of the country show no sign of setting up a real peace process.

2. The collapse of Arab governance around the region. Think of ISIS as a pathogen that preys on weak hosts in the Muslim world. **In fact, there is something of a political law: The weaker a Muslim state, the stronger will be the presence of ISIS or like-minded groups.** So, in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen — countries that are completely failed states or are largely failing states — the presence of these groups is strong. In Muslim countries with somewhat competent governments such as Indonesia, the presence of these groups is relatively small.

3. Unprecedented waves of immigration to Europe from the Muslim world. Germany alone has taken more than a million refugees and asylum seekers. European countries simply do not have the ideological framework the United States has in the shape of the “American Dream” that has helped to absorb successfully wave after wave of immigration to the States, including Muslim Americans who are well integrated into American society. There is no analogous French dream or German dream.

4. The rise of European ultranationalist and protofascist parties, a problem amplified by the massive immigration from Muslim countries into Europe. These parties define themselves as deeply opposed to immigrants and are ultranationalist in flavor. They once played a very marginal role in European politics, but now these parties are now doing well in Austria, France, Hungary, Poland and Switzerland. The rise of these parties is reflective of the rising anti-immigrant sentiment in many European societies that in turn amplifies the feelings of alienation that many Muslims feel in Europe.

5. The marginalization of Muslims in Europe who often live separate and unequal lives. An indication of how marginalized European Muslims are is provided by the following bleak statistics: The proportion of the French prison population that is Muslim is estimated to be around 60%, yet Muslims only account for about 8% of France's total population. In Belgian prisons there is a similar story: 30% of the prison population is Muslim, yet Muslims only make up 6% of the overall population. It's therefore not surprising that French and Belgian prisons have proven to

be universities of jihad. The members of the ISIS cell responsible for the attacks in Paris in November that killed 130 and the attacks in March 2016 in Brussels, Belgium, at the airport and on the subway system that killed 32, bonded through criminal activities or in prison. [Abdelhamid Abaaoud](#) and [Salah Abdeslam](#), the cell's masterminds, were childhood friends who grew up in the Brussels neighborhood of Molenbeek. In 2010, the men were arrested and [spent time](#) in the same prison. Ibrahim Abdeslam, Salah's brother, also spent time in prison with Abaaoud. He would go on to be one of the terrorists in the November Paris attacks. [Khalid and Ibrahim El Bakraoui](#), both suicide bombers in the Brussels attacks, had served lengthy prison sentences for armed robbery and assault on police.

Muslim citizens in France are 2½ times less likely to be called for a job interview than a similar Christian candidate, according to researchers at Stanford University. Many French Muslims live in grim banlieues, the suburbs of large French cities (similar to housing projects in the United States), where they find themselves largely divorced from mainstream French society. According to the Renseignements Généraux, a police agency that monitors militants in France, half the neighborhoods with a high Muslim population are isolated from French social and political life. The French term for these neighborhoods is equivalent to "sensitive urban zones," where youth unemployment can be as high as 45%.

None of these five problems is easily solvable and they feed into ISIS' narrative that Muslims are under attack by the West and also by the Shia as well as by any Muslim who doesn't share their extremist ideology. **If these problems cannot be ameliorated---and in the short term many of them will not be ameliorated--the West will be confronted by a son of ISIS and, down the line, a grandson of ISIS.**

7. Emerging Trends in Terrorism

1. Terrorists Merging with Media

In 1985, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher spoke about terrorism at the annual convention of the American Bar Association. Following a recent high-profile hijacking of a TWA passenger plane forced to land in Beirut that had received lavish media coverage, Thatcher urged that news organizations "must try to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend."

It's a dilemma that news organizations have grappled with for many decades since. Terrorist attacks are, of course, news, but terrorists also depend on "the oxygen of publicity" provided by the media to spread accounts of their violence. But what happens when today's terrorists are the media? In the past, terrorists had to rely on the media to get their messages out, but now they can completely control their own message, from making their own content to ensuring its widespread distribution.

In a new twist of the past three years, ISIS and other jihadist militants are also now reporting on their own bloody work in real time. Consider that ISIS produces lavish TV productions, filmed professionally in high definition — of everything from its murder of civilians, to profiles of its heroic fighters, to the supposedly idyllic life that can be lived under its purportedly utopian rule. The group also has its own de facto news agency, *Amaq*, that credibly reports on ISIS' own atrocities. ISIS also publishes multiple webzines in English, French, Russian and Turkish. Most strikingly, terrorist organizations and their supporters maintain many tens of thousands of accounts on social media platforms, including Twitter and Facebook, which they use to further propagate the ISIS message. More and more, those accounts are documenting and broadcasting terrorist violence, as it plays out live.

When ISIS militants took hostages at the upscale cafe in Dhaka, Bangladesh in June 2016 and killed 20 mostly non-Muslim foreigners, at the same time they also sent images of their victims lying in pools of blood to the ISIS new agency, *Amaq*, which posted them for the world to see. Similarly, the same month Larossi Abballa, an ISIS-inspired militant, killed a police official and his partner outside of Paris. Immediately after the murders, Abballa videotaped himself live on Facebook declaring his allegiance to ISIS. While Abballa was taping this statement, near him was the couple's terrified 3-year-old son.

Meanwhile, pledging allegiance to ISIS on Facebook after a murderous attack has now become almost routine for terrorists in the West. Omar Mateen, the terrorist in Orlando who killed 49 at a gay nightclub, pledged his allegiance to ISIS on Facebook as he carried out his attack. So, too, did the terrorists in San Bernardino in December who killed 14 attending an office holiday party.

One of the big ideas of modern terrorism, from the Munich Olympics of 1972 during which Palestinian terrorists kidnapped Israeli athletes to 9/11, has been to use widespread TV coverage of violent acts to propagate and advance the political ideas of the militants. Today, terrorists bypass traditional media entirely and they now act simultaneously as the protagonists, producers and propagators of their acts of nihilistic violence.

2. Terrorist Groups with Armed Drones

Hezbollah, the militant Shiite group that is headquartered in Lebanon, [reportedly used drones](#) in late September 2014 to bomb a building used by the al-Qaeda affiliated Nusra Front, along Lebanon's border with Syria. The armed drones, combined with fire from Hezbollah ground troops, killed 23 Nusra militants and wounded some 10 others, according to a report by an Iranian news agency.

Iran is the key sponsor for Hezbollah and has plausibly claimed for the past several years to manufacture armed drones. Hezbollah's use of drones marks

a milestone for terrorist groups worldwide: It would be the first time a group other than a nation state used armed drones successfully to carry out an attack, marking an important step towards closing the gap between the drone capabilities of countries such as the United States and militant groups such as Hezbollah. After all, it was only in the months immediately after 9/11 that the United States mastered the technology of arming drones and began to use them in combat. In August 2016 Hezbollah also released video online showing what appears to be a commercial drone dropping small bombs on rebel positions in Aleppo, Syria.

Previously, drones were used by militant groups only for surveillance purposes. In August 2014 ISIS uploaded a video to YouTube that showed aerial views of Syrian Army Military Base 93 in Raqqa province in northern Syria that had been shot by a drone. In the past year ISIS has used small armed drones for combat missions

ISIS use of armed drones shows how warfare is changing: The monopoly of states on the use of military force is eroding, and new technology is leveling the playing field between states and militant groups. So what can the United States and other nations do to protect themselves from this dawning threat? Most armed drones are relatively easy to shoot down if you have sophisticated air defenses or a fleet of jet fighter aircraft. Western countries generally have these, but one can imagine a dystopian future where terrorist groups are able to deploy armed drones against less well-defended targets.

This may be particularly a problem for US embassies, which are well defended against vehicle-borne bombs, but not against armed drones.

3. The Insider Threat at Airports

The bomb smuggled aboard the Metrojet flight that killed 224 by an ISIS-recruited insider at Sharm el-Sheikh airport in Sinai in October 2015 raised the question: Could such an insider attack happen in the West? Short answer: It isn't out of the question.

Five American citizens involved in serious terrorist crimes since 9/11 have worked at major U.S. airports in a variety of capacities. They were recruited by variously ISIS; al-Shabaab; a virulent "homegrown" jihadist cell based in California; and another such group in New York City.

In the years after 9/11, Kevin Lamar James was jailed in California's Folsom prison where he formed a group that he conceived of as "al-Qaeda in America." James recruited others to help him with his plans. One of them was 21-year-old Gregory Vernon Patterson who had recently worked at a duty-free shop at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). James thought

that Patterson's inside knowledge of LAX would be helpful for his plans and when he made a list of potential targets in California, James listed LAX. James' crew planned to attack around the fourth anniversary of 9/11. They financed their activities by sticking up gas stations and their plans only came to light during the course of a routine investigation of a gas station robbery by police in Torrance, California, who found documents that laid out the group's plans for jihadist mayhem. Members of the California cell are now serving long prison terms.

On October 29, 2008, Shirwa Ahmed became one of the first Americans ever to conduct a suicide attack anywhere in the world when he was recruited by al-Shabaab to drive a truck loaded with explosives into a government building in Somalia, blowing himself up and killing 20 other people. Ahmed graduated from high school in Minneapolis in 2003 and then worked at the Minneapolis airport pushing passengers in wheelchairs; it was during this period that he became increasingly religious and was recruited by al-Shabaab. Abdisalan Hussein Ali became a suicide bomber for al-Shabaab in Somalia in 2011 and had also worked at the Minneapolis airport, in a Caribou coffee shop. Similarly, Abdirahmaan Muhumed, who was killed in 2014 while fighting for ISIS in Syria, had worked at the Minneapolis airport, where he had a security clearance that gave him access to the tarmac and to planes.

The problem of militants working at airports and airlines is not peculiar only to the States. In the past decade, British citizens working at Heathrow and at British Airways have conspired with members of al-Qaeda. In the United Kingdom, British Airways IT expert Rajib Karim, 31, conspired with al-Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen to place a bomb on a U.S.-bound plane. In 2010, one of the leaders of al-Qaeda's Yemeni affiliate, Anwar al-Awlaki, wrote an email to Karim asking "Is it possible to get a package or a person with a package on board a flight heading to the US?" Karim replied: "I do not know much about US I can work with the bros to find out the possibilities of shipping a package to a US-bound plane." Karim had applied for cabin-crew training before he was arrested and was sentenced to 30 years in 2011. In 2006, an employee at a shop in Heathrow working on the "airside" post-security section of the airport provided advice about the security conditions to self-proclaimed al-Qaeda terrorist Sohail Qureshi, who was convicted of multiple terrorism charges.

Then-Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson announced in June 2015 that he was implementing new measures to "address the potential insider threat" by mandating biannual background checks for workers at U.S. airports, while also requiring airports to reduce the number of access points to secured areas and to increase randomized screening of airport employees.

These are welcome developments, but the real vulnerabilities exist in some of the 103 countries that send direct flights to the United States.

4. Bleed out of ISIS “Foreign Fighters” from Syria

The likely defeat of ISIS on the battlefield raises the question: What to do about ISIS foreign fighters who survive? Thousands of foreign fighters may melt from the battlefield. Since we know from other jihads that these foreign fighters are the likely terrorists of tomorrow, Western governments as well as Arab and North African governments must think through what they plan to do to track these fighters and prevent them from carrying out attacks.

8. What can be done?

There seems to be some conceptual confusion in the U. S. government about what “Countering Violent Extremism” programs are attempting to do: Is it counter-radicalization? Or is it counter-recruitment? Counter-radicalization--turning many millions of Muslims around the world away from radical ideas---seems both a nebulous mission and one that may not be achievable. A far more specific task is trying to stop the relatively small number of Muslims who are trying to join ISIS or sign up for its ideology from doing so. From an American national security perspective that is, after all, what we all want to prevent.

Here are 16 things that can be done, and one measure that should not be taken.

1. Enlist rather than alienate the Muslim community

The terrorist attacks in San Bernardino and Orlando touched off a furious political debate about how best to safeguard Americans, featuring such solutions as shutting off Muslim immigration, but that would not do much to deal with the threat because lethal attacks by jihadist terrorists in the States since 9/11 have been conducted largely by American citizens.

In fact, the real lessons learned should come from the law enforcement agencies that have studied jihadist terrorists in depth. A very telling indicator of future violence by a terrorist, FBI behavioral analysts have found, is what they term “leakage.” Leakage was first identified by the FBI in 1999 in the context of school shootings, emerging from the observation that a student who was going to do something violent had often intentionally or unintentionally revealed something significant about the impending act, anything from confiding in a friend to making ominous “they’ll be sorry” remarks. Leakage is, in short, when a violent perpetrator signals to people in his circle that he is planning an act of violence.

What was true of school shootings turned out to be true for terrorist crimes as well. In an ongoing study of some 80 terrorism cases in the States since 2009, the FBI found that “leakage” happened more than 80% of the time. Those to whom information was leaked, termed “bystanders,” were broken down by the FBI into peers, family members, authority figures and strangers. FBI analysts found an average of three bystanders per case, and in one case as many as 14. Some “bystanders” saw radicalization behavior.

Others saw actual plotting and planning, such as the accumulation of weapons, self-educating about how to make explosives or preparations to travel overseas for terrorist training.

FBI analysts were dismayed by how common it was for bystanders to know that a radicalized individual was up to something yet failed to tip off the authorities. Analysts graphed out the bystanders who were most likely to come forward with information versus those least likely to do so. Peers were aware of the most concerning information, but they were the least likely to volunteer it. Family members were often aware of both radicalization and planning, but they came forward less often than authority figures such as college professors, supervisors, military commanders or clerics. These figures were reasonably likely to offer information but were more aware of a suspect's radical sympathies than of any actual plotting.

Strangers were the most likely to come forward, which could be helpful. A tip from a clerk at a New Jersey Circuit City — who in 2005 was asked to make copies of a videotape on which he saw men shooting off weapons and shouting “Allahu Akbar!” — developed into the case in which a group of six men were convicted for plotting an attack to kill soldiers at the Fort Dix, New Jersey, army base. However, strangers made up only 5% of the bystanders with useful information about a suspect.

The importance of the information that a peer can have was underlined by the terrorist attack in San Bernardino in which 14 people were killed by the married couple, Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik. Farook's friend, Enrique Marquez provided the two semiautomatic rifles that Farook and his wife used in the massacre. Marquez also knew that Farook was planning to carry out some kind of terrorist attack as early as 2011. Marquez pled guilty earlier this month to a variety of federal crimes.

The lesson of the FBI study of terrorism cases is that the most useful information comes from peers and family members. That's why community outreach to Muslim communities to enlist their help in detecting those who may be becoming militant is the most fruitful approach to dealing with the scourge of terrorism. This is the opposite approach from painting all Muslim immigrants as potential terrorists.

2. Either through electronic warfare or other means, take out ISIS' propaganda production facilities in the Middle East.

ISIS announced its involvement in the attack in June at the café in Dhaka, Bangladesh, that killed 20 through *Amaq*, which is effectively ISIS' news agency. Why does *Amaq* continue to exist? Also, ISIS continues to pump out online videos, audios and webzines. These require crude production facilities of some kind. These, too, should be eliminated. (Of course, some will argue that there is some intelligence value derived from having ISIS propaganda facilities continuing to function, but surely that is outweighed by the value of the larger enterprise of eliminating ISIS' appeal.)

3. Intensify the military campaign against ISIS.

The less the ISIS “caliphate” exists as a physical entity, the less the group can claim it is the “Islamic State” that it purports to be. That should involve more U.S. Special Forces on the ground embedded with the Iraqi military as well as other coalition forces in Syria and more U.S. forward air controllers calling in close air support strikes for those forces.

4. Institute a no-fly zone in northern Syria, but be aware of how complex that has now become.

President Trump has often called for safe zones in Syria. This is an excellent idea in theory, because this will reduce the battlefield success of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, who is the principal driver of the Syrian war and will also reduce the flow of refugees into Europe, but, based on multiple discussions with US military officials based in the Middle East, implementing such safe zones would be quite complex because it would entail a no fly zone if it had a chance to succeed.

First, appropriate authorities would have to be given to American fighter jet pilots to shoot down planes defying the no fly zone, including possibly Russian planes that are also conducting air strikes in Syria. Second, complicating matters, some of the planes that the Syrian air force flies are the same model as some of the older Russian planes that are flying over Syria. Third, Syria has excellent air defenses that would have to be taken out. The Russians have deployed the SA-23 surface-to-air missile system to Syria, which, according to US military officials, is one of the most sophisticated air defense systems in the world. Fourth, as a matter of international law a no fly zone in Syria would require some kind of UN resolution authorizing it and Russia would veto such a measure.

In 1999, NATO did impose a no-fly zone in Kosovo without seeking a UN resolution, in order to carry out air strikes on Serbian forces. Trump could do something similar, for instance, unilaterally ordering American warplanes to bomb Syrian airfields so Assad’s warplanes could no longer use them. Of course, this would be a significant escalation of America’s role in the conflict and would also skirt international law.

5. Build a database of all the “foreign fighters” who have gone to Syria to fight for ISIS and the al-Qaeda affiliate there.

This is one of the recommendations of the House Homeland Security Committee’s 2015 report on foreign fighters in Syria and it is a very good one. How can you prevent an attack by returning foreign fighters if you are not cognizant of their names and links to ISIS? Right now, Interpol has a list of some 8,000 foreign fighters, but the estimated 40,000 foreign fighters who have gone to fight in Syria dwarf that.

6. Enlist defectors from ISIS to tell their stories publicly.

Nothing is more powerful than hearing from former members of the group that ISIS is not creating an Islamist utopia in the areas it controls, but a hell on earth. Reducing the flow of foreign fighters to ISIS is a key to reducing ISIS' manpower. Muhammad Jamal Khweis, 26, of Alexandria, Virginia, was held by Kurdish fighters after allegedly deserting from ISIS in early 2015. Khweis gave an interview to a Kurdish TV station in which he said: "My message to the American people is: the life in Mosul [the Iraqi capital of ISIS] it's really, really bad. The people [that] were controlling Mosul don't represent the religion. Daesh, ISIS, ISIL, they don't represent the religion, I don't see them as good Muslims."

U.S. prosecutors could throw the book at Khweis for joining ISIS, and he could get 20 years or more, but, alternatively, they could try something more creative — a deal in which he tells prosecutors what he knows about ISIS in return for a reduced prison sentence. And one more thing: He would also have to appear before the American public, explaining that ISIS is creating hell in the areas it controls.

7. Amplify voices such as that of the ISIS opposition group Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently.

The group routinely posts photos online of bread lines in Raqqa, the de facto capital of ISIS in northern Syria, and writes about electricity shortages in the city. This helps to undercut ISIS propaganda that it is a truly functioning state.

8. Support the work of clerics such as Imam Mohamed Magid of northern Virginia.

Magid has personally convinced a number of American Muslims seduced into support for jihad by ISIS that what the group is doing is contrary to the teachings of Islam.

9. Keep up pressure on social media companies such as Twitter to enforce their own terms of use to take down any ISIS material that encourages violence.

Since 2015, Twitter has taken down some 360,000 accounts-- including 235,000 accounts in the last six months-- used by ISIS supporters, but the group continues to use Twitter and other social media platforms to propagate its message.

10. Amplify support to Turkey to help it to tamp down the foreign fighter flow through their country to ISIS in neighboring Syria.

Turkey, which had long been criticized by Western countries for allowing foreign fighters to move through its territory on their way to Syria, has clamped down on that traffic into Syria. Those efforts by the Turks are paying off, according to ISIS itself. In 2015, ISIS posted advice in one of its English-language online publications to would-be foreign fighters, saying, “It is important to know that the Turkish intelligence agencies are in no way friends of the Islamic State [ISIS].”

11. Relentlessly hammer home the message that while ISIS positions itself as the defender of Muslims, its victims are overwhelmingly fellow Muslims.

12. No-Fly, No-Buy. Prevent suspected terrorists from buying military-style assault rifles.

Astonishingly, over the past decade or so more than 2,000 people known or suspected to be terrorists have bought guns and assault rifles. Even while suspected jihadist terrorists are under some form of FBI investigation, they can easily buy military-style assault weapons. **Omar Mateen, Nidal Hasan and Carlos Bledsoe—three of the most prominent domestic terrorists since 9/11—were all FBI subjects of interest, yet all legally purchased semi-automatic weapons shortly before their attacks. If you have been the subject of an FBI terrorism inquiry it’s obviously absurd that you should be able to legally purchase semi-automatic weapons.** Congress should pass a law preventing this from happening in the future.

13. Stay in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is going down the tubes and it is in worse shape than it has been since 9/11. The Taliban control or contest a third of the population. That’s 10 million people; more than ISIS controlled at the height of its power in the summer of 2014 when it might have controlled 8 million people at most.

The Obama administration had a counterproductive policy of announcing withdrawals from Afghanistan even as it surged troops into the country. Exhibit A: the December 1 2009 speech at West Point where Obama announced the surge of troops into Afghanistan and also announced their withdrawal date. Of course, that withdrawal date came and went, as did a number of others. Constantly announcing proposed withdrawal dates for U.S. forces has enabled the Taliban to believe they can simply wait out the clock. It also has contributed to a lack of confidence among the Afghan population, eight out of 10 of whom say that the Afghan army and police need support from countries such as the United States if they are to do their jobs properly, according to polling last year by the Asia Foundation.

It is in American and Afghan interests for the U.S. to stay in Afghanistan so it doesn’t turn into Iraq circa 2014 with the Taliban controlling much of the country while also hosting a strong presence of ISIS and al-Qaeda as well as every other jihadist group of note.

What to do? Publicly state that the U.S. already has a Strategic Partnership with Afghanistan until 2024 that was negotiated by the Obama administration and we promise to be there for the long term in an advise and assist capacity along the usual lines of providing intelligence, Special Forces trainers, close air support and the like. Afghans don't care if we have 8,400 troops, or 12,000 troops or 20,000 troops. Clearly there is a difference from a *purely military* point of view but from a *political* point of view the message Afghans want to hear is that we are not abandoning them and plan to stay the course. Such a public announcement of a long-term commitment to Afghanistan will help NATO and other allies also commit for the long term; it will also undermine the Taliban and change the calculus of the hedging strategies of neighbors such as Pakistan.

14. Free American hostages in the Afghan/Pakistan border regions

There are five Americans being held by the Taliban-affiliated Haqqanis. The Trump administration could put a win on the board by securing their release. The Haqqanis want Anas Haqqani--one of their family members—to be released in a prisoner exchange for the American hostages. Anas is a relatively bit player in the Haqqani Network who is now on death row in Afghanistan for raising money for terrorism. This prisoner exchange would be somewhat politically costly for the government of Ashraf Ghani, but it would secure five American lives, some of whom have been in captivity for five years. The U.S. can help broker this deal.

15. Develop “micro targeting” counter messages for those who are looking at ISIS propaganda.

Advertisers on the Internet routinely do this for consumers looking at, say, shoes and there is really no technical reason that this could not be done effectively for those who are looking at ISIS propaganda. Indeed, companies such as Google are already doing this and the U.S. State Department is also quietly supporting similar efforts around the Muslim world using local voices in local languages that counter the message of ISIS.

16. Increase funding and research for “photo DNA” technologies of the kind that have largely banished child pornography images from social media platforms.

17. Some in the Trump administration want to designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. This is a bad idea that will surely backfire, as it would effectively criminalize and label as terrorists the tens of millions of Muslims around the world who are part of the Muslim Brotherhood. While it is certainly the case that a small number of Muslim Brothers have radicalized and engaged in terrorism, that does not make the Brotherhood a terrorist organization. There are tens of millions of Christian fundamentalists in the United States, a tiny number of whom have conducted violence against abortion clinics and doctors, yet that would not be

an argument for criminalizing Christian fundamentalists.

Also members of the Muslim Brotherhood play significant roles in the governments and/or parliaments of Iraq, Jordan, Tunisia, and Turkey. Designating the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization would label as criminals political leaders of four countries in the Middle East, some of which are close American allies and all of which happen to be relatively open societies compared to the Gulf State autocracies. In Egypt the Sisi government has criminalized the Muslim Brotherhood, an extraordinary decision since it effectively has criminalized the largest opposition organization in the country as well as the previous Morsi government. The United States should not be aligning itself with the policies of the Egyptian dictatorship.