“Defeating” ISIS: The Real Threats and Challenges

By Anthony H. Cordesman

Working Draft: August 4, 2016

Please provide comments to acordesman@gmail.com

Photo: ALI AL-SAADI/AFP/Getty Images
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Terrorism is all too real a threat, and mass attacks cause a special kind of fear. Terrorist movements like ISIS kill the innocent for the worst of causes and the worst of reasons. They seek to use fear to separate the West from the Muslim world, and to divide the Muslim world and dominate it. They try to use alienated Muslims in the West to create a growing climate of anger and distrust with Europe and the United States. They deliberately seek to get the West to overreact and lash out against all Muslims and Islam, just as they try to use extremism and violence to try to get the populations of Muslim countries to attack their own governments.

They also feed on Western ignorance of Islam, and the fear of new and unfamiliar risks. Americans and others in the West have learned to live with most forms of mortality. We accept the fact that life has a wide range of risks, almost all of which are far more serious than terrorism: Lightning, suicide, traffic, disease, home accidents produce far more deaths.

The fact remains, however, that Americans—and others inside and outside the Islamic world—must learn a grim reality at the popular and political level that many security and counterterrorism experts have known for years. Even the most effective counterterrorism efforts can contain and limit terrorism, but cannot “defeat” it.

They are going to have to learn to live with a low-level risk of sporadic terrorist attacks indefinitely into the future, and as the violent consequences of political upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa. They are also going to have to learn to keep their fear of terrorism in proportion with the real world risk. Terrorism is only one threat among many, and the fear of a single threat cannot be allowed to trigger measures that are out of proportion to the threat, encourage religious hatred, or divide Islam from the rest of the world.

“Defeating ISIS” and “Defeating Terrorism”

It is possible to sharply reduce the levels of terrorism by ISIS and other movements, and to contain and deter many attacks. There are far too many forces at work within the Islamic world, however, to entirely “defeat” terrorism during the next decade, and probably well beyond that.

While ISIS may be “defeated” as a caliphate, it also will either survive and disperse terrorist movement or see its volunteers and fighters continue to present a threat under some different name. Various U.S. intelligence officials from the DNI on down have made it clear that ISIS’s territorial losses did not not lead to a major cut in the flow of foreign volunteers through the spring of 2016.

Even if one could ignore the other Islamic terrorist and extremist groups in the world, even the best defeat of ISIS’s control over territory in Syria and Iraq will mean tens of thousands of fighters will remain or go somewhere else. Many will not become passive or pacifists.
As **Figure One** and **Figure Two** show, ISIS is also only one of the major terrorist threats in the region and the world.

- **Figure One** shows that ISIS is only one of the top five major terrorist groups in the world.

- **Figure Two** shows that ISIS is only one of the groups the U.S. is actively fighting and the START data lists over 70 different MENA terrorist groups that have come and either gone or stayed since 1970

As **Figure Three** shows, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is only one of three major centers of terrorism that also include Central Asia and South Asia, and while the MENA region dominates in terms of incidents – if all terrorist groups are included – it is only one aspect of the broader problem.
### Figure One: Five Perpetrator Groups with the Most Attacks Worldwide, 2014-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Total Attacks</th>
<th>Total Deaths*</th>
<th>Total Injured*</th>
<th>Total Kidnapped/Hostages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taliban</td>
<td>1093</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>4512</td>
<td>3492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)**</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>1090</td>
<td>6050</td>
<td>6328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boko Haram</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>5450</td>
<td>6663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maoists/Communist Party of India-Maoist</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK)</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The sharp increase in attacks carried out by the PKK took place in the latter half of 2015, when they carried out 38 attacks per month on average, compared to an average of two attacks per month between January and June. Half of these attacks (50%) targeted police.

While ISIL was responsible for 31% fewer terrorist attacks in Iraq (741 in 2015 compared to 969 in 2014), the number of attacks carried out by ISIL in Syria increased by 39% (147 in 2015 compared to 90 in 2014). Furthermore, the geographic reach of attacks by ISIL and its affiliates expanded as existing terrorist groups pledged allegiance to ISIL. In addition to Boko Haram in West Africa, the most active of these ISIL branches were located in Afghanistan/Pakistan, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen.

Among these five perpetrator groups, the average lethality of attacks carried out by Boko Haram (12.7 people killed per attack), ISIL (7.3), the Taliban (4.4), and TTP (3.5) were higher than the global average (2.3) in 2015. The average number of people killed by attacks carried out by the PKK (1.2), and Maoists in India (0.5) was much lower by comparison.

All five of the most active groups markedly increased the number of people kidnapped or taken hostage in 2015; however, the increases in hostage-takings by Maoists in India and the PKK were exceptionally large. Attacks carried out by these two groups in 2015 involved 843 victims kidnapped or taken hostage, compared to 231 in 2014.

Figure Two: Major Terrorist Groups the U.S. is Fighting in the MENA Region and South Asia

(Excludes more than 70 smaller Islamist Extreme Terrorist Groups in Both Regions)

Total of 9,482 incidents between 2010 and end 2015; Includes Haqqani Network; Huthi Extremists; Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL); Al-Nusra Front; Al-Qaida; Al-Qaida in Iraq; Al-Qaida in Lebanon; Al-Qaida in Saudi Arabia; Al-Qaida in Yemen; Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP); Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM); Taliban; Taliban (Pakistan))

Figure Three: Key Centers of Terrorism: 2010 to 2011

MENA, South Asia, and Central Asia

MENA

South Asia

Source: START, https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?start_yearonly=2010&end_yearonly=2015&start_year=&start_month=&start_day=&end_year=&end_month=&end_day=&region=6&asmSelect0=&asmSelect1=&dtp2=all&success=yes&casualties_type=b&casualties_max=, Includes All incidents regardless of doubt.
The Forces that Will Maintain the Threat for At Least the Next Decade

More broadly, it will be far more than a decade before any form of stability can be established in even the Middle Eastern part of the Islamic world. As for the United States and the West, they face serious challenges in integrating a growing number of Muslims into their societies. Moreover, it simply is not possible to fully secure open societies, prevent sudden attacks by the alienated and disturbed, or defeat Islamic extremism by any mix of counterterrorism and military force than does not address its causes.

We must learn to accept the reality that massive social change can produce continuing bursts of sudden violence either out of alienation and anger, or in an effort to paralyze and divide the Islam world both within and from other faiths and cultures. The forces of change and instability are simply too great.

The MENA is, however, a warning of just how deep the forces involved go. UN and Census Bureau Data warn that the population increased by some five times between 1950 and 2015, and will increase by another 50% by 2050. Urbanization have increase during that period from around 30% to over 60%, and most countries are hyperurbanized, pushing populations of different sects, ethnic groups, races, and tribes together in ways that have never occurred before.

As UN development, World Bank, and IMF studies have all warned, sheer population growth and past failures to reform and develop ensure that all of these forces will take a decade of serious reform to change in many states, and some states – such as Yemen – lack the resources to sustain reform even if their government could change.

Figures Four to Figure Ten show just some of the measures of the forces of change in the region and the pressures upon it. These are also pressures that have grown far worse as a result of the upheavals that began in 2011, and wars and civil conflicts/repression in Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen.

“Failed secularism” is not the rule, but it also is not the exception. Far too many MENA governments are grossly corrupt, failed to govern effectively, have no real development plans, and give far too much of their wealth to their leaders and their cronies. Income distribution is terrible and steadily deteriorating, depriving many of their traditional security and status. Authoritarianism abuses any serious peaceful of opposition, and rulers attempt to control every aspect of Islam and religion.

Economies no longer can afford to generate more government jobs, and cannot begin to create the number of private sector jobs extremely young populations need – often ones where more than 40% of the population is under 24 years of age and where youth unemployment and underemployment ranges from 20% to over 40%, and dead end jobs have often replace real careers. Increasingly well-educated women are marginalized far more than men, depriving many nations of the productive output of half their labor force.

Islamic extremism has to some extent has to some extent become the outlet for governments and societies that have failed to offer real secular opportunities, and particularly to the small minority that is most polarized and alienated. Education and social services deteriorate, and the Internet and the web have replaced meaningful social development while giving large numbers of youth access to the voices of extremism. While better education and the many voices of Islamic moderation can help, a broad
distrust of any form of authority, and the inability of governments to control the message, virtually ensures that at least as small minority can always be recruited for new acts of violence and terrorism.

Worse, the post-2011 upheavals, conflicts, and repression in in Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen have made all of these problems far worse. The spillover of war and civil violence has had a major impact on Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Algeria and Iran have a tenuous stability, but only though serious – if very different -- kinds of, repression. They also interact with Islamist extremism and violence in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan in South Asia, and to a lesser degree in Central and East Asia.

These forces also interact with migration, immigration, and refugees, and again and declining populations in part of the West. Muslims from the MENA region, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and South Asia all have these forces as a common reason to seek better lives and careers in the West – whether in Europe or the United States. Long before 2011 and the current refugee crisis, Muslims and other migrants took advantage of Europe’s aging population, countries with declining birth rates, and the unpopularity of many poorly paid manual and service jobs, and moved to a Europe that had even less experience with -- and tolerance of -- any kind of “immigrant” from a different faith, culture, and linguistic background than is the case in the United States.

As is the case within the Islamic world, there is no one cause that turned some of these immigrants, and particularly their children into extremists. Prejudice, fear, racism, de facto segregation into ethnic neighborhoods and slums, discrimination in schools and job opportunities, all acted to alienate some of the new immigrants, and they too became dependent on the Internet and the web and sometimes on extremist voices and sites. These forces too are hard to change, and it is again far more realistic to take in terms of a decade or more of serious reform efforts than defeating terrorism and extremism by the counterterrorism or any form of force.
Figure Four: Government Effectiveness and Failed Secularism

![Bar chart showing government effectiveness and secularism](chart.png)

(Data Source: World Bank Governance Indicators 2015)

Figure Five: Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Ranking in 2014 (ranking in Most Corrupt of 177 Countries)

![Bar chart showing corruption perceptions index](chart2.png)

Corruption Index

177 is worst corruption ranking in the world
Figure Six: Massive Demographic Pressure

MENA Total Population: 1950-2050 (in Thousands)

Multiplication factor representing the change in population

From 1950 to 2015 = X4.98
From 2015 to 2050 = X1.48
From 1950 to 2050 = X7.37


Figure Seven: Hyperurbanization Brings Sects, Ethnic Groups, and tribes to new Interactive Concentrations: From 15-25% in 1950 to the Following in 2016

Figure Eight: A Youth Bulge Puts Intense Pressure on Education, Services, Employment, and Popular Expectations and Needs

(Percentage of Native Population Below 25 in 2015)


Figure Nine: MENA Performance in Creating Even Pointless Government Jobs Was Dismal Before 2011 and Employment Issue Have Grown Much Worse

Total and Youth Unemployment Rates by Region Before 2011 (2008): The Threat From POAYMs

Source: IMF, World Economic and Financial Surveys, Regional Economic Outlook, Middle East and Central Asia, October 2010, p. 38
The Changing Dynamics of Islam

All of these forces ensure that the U.S and the world will continue to face extremism and terrorism regardless of what happens to ISIS/ISIL/Daesh and Al Qa’ida. Defeating given extremist organizations inside and outside the Islam world matters, but it will be a continuing effort directed as much against individual extremists and newly emerging groups as any continuing threat.

It is also important to understand the sheer scale of the challenge. The Islamic world is growing sharply. The idea it can somehow fenced off from the U.S. or the West, or that the level of violence within the Islamic world ignore the key realities of a steadily more global economy, as well as the fact that the governments of largely Islamic allies are America’s key allies in fighting terrorism.

**Figure Eleven** and **Figure Twelve** show the sharp growth in Islam relative to the world’s other religions between 2010 and 2050, and that there will be a 73% increase in the number of the world’s Muslims during this period.

**Figure Thirteen** shows the importance of religion to key populations within Islam, and the importance of avoiding any real clash between civilizations in maintaining broad Muslim opposition to extremism. At the same time, the Pew Trust survey shown in **Figure Thirteen** found that,

Recent surveys show (that most people in several countries with significant Muslim populations have an unfavorable view of ISIS, including virtually all respondents in Lebanon and 94% in
Jordan….Relatively small shares say they see ISIS favorably. In some countries, considerable portions of the population do not offer an opinion about ISIS, including a majority (62%) of Pakistanis.

Favorable views of ISIS are somewhat higher in Nigeria (14%) than most other nations. Among Nigerian Muslims, 20% say they see ISIS favorably (compared with 7% of Nigerian Christians). The Nigerian militant group Boko Haram, which has been conducting a terrorist campaign in the country for years, has sworn allegiance to ISIS.

More generally, Muslims mostly say that suicide bombings and other forms of violence against civilians in the name of Islam are rarely or never justified, including 92% in Indonesia and 91% in Iraq. In the United States, a 2011 survey found that 86% of Muslims …say that such tactics are rarely or never justified. An additional 7% say suicide bombings are sometimes justified and 1% say they are often justified in these circumstances.

In a few countries, a quarter or more of Muslims say that these acts of violence are at least sometimes justified, including 40% in the Palestinian territories, 39% in Afghanistan, 29% in Egypt and 26% in Bangladesh.

In many cases, people in countries with large Muslim populations are as concerned as Western nations...about the threat of Islamic extremism, and have become increasingly concerned in recent years. About two-thirds of people in Nigeria (68%) and Lebanon (67%) said earlier this year they are very concerned about Islamic extremism in their country, both up significantly since 2013.

Figure Fourteen shows that a more recent 2016 survey reported in the Washington Post had broadly similar results.

U.S. efforts to contain and deter terrorism cannot be effective if they are centered in homeland defense. They must also be centered in strategic partnerships with MENA nations that are the center of the ISIS threat like Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Similar partnerships with Islamic states in South and East Asia.

The struggle against extremism cannot be “won” in the sense that the threat will end quickly or decisively. Attacking terrorists is a grim necessity, but real victory means attacking its causes—something that requires time and a serious commitment to reform by the states involved. It means providing hope and building growing trust by effective governance, creating political structures that actually that serve the people, economic reform, and shaping a civil society that focuses on build the future rather than trying to retreat into a mythical and repressive past.
Figure Eleven: The Growing Global Impact of Islam: 2010-2050

Figure Twelve: The Demographics of Islam: 2010-2050

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Region's Total Population</th>
<th>Region's Muslim Population</th>
<th>% Muslim in Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>4,054,940,000</td>
<td>986,420,000</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2050</td>
<td>4,937,900,000</td>
<td>1,457,720,000</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East-North Africa</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>341,020,000</td>
<td>317,070,000</td>
<td>93.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2050</td>
<td>588,960,000</td>
<td>551,900,000</td>
<td>93.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>822,730,000</td>
<td>248,420,000</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2050</td>
<td>1,809,960,000</td>
<td>669,710,000</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>742,550,000</td>
<td>43,470,000</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2050</td>
<td>696,330,000</td>
<td>70,870,000</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>344,530,000</td>
<td>3,480,000</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2050</td>
<td>435,420,000</td>
<td>10,350,000</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America-Caribbean</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>590,980,000</td>
<td>840,000</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2050</td>
<td>748,620,000</td>
<td>940,000</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure Thirteen: Muslim Concern for the Role of Islam in governance and Law

Figure Fourteen: The Lack of Broad Arab Support for ISIS in the Middle East

Not many Arabs sympathize with the Islamic State. The percent agreeing with the Islamic State’s goals range from 0.4 percent in Jordan to 6.4 percent in the Palestinian territories. The percent agreeing with the Islamic State’s use of violence range from 0.4 percent in Morocco to 5.4 percent in the Palestinian territories. The percent agreeing that the Islamic State’s tactics are compatible with Islam range from 1.0 percent in Jordan to 8.9 percent in the Palestinian territories.

Creating Bridges Rather than Burning Them

There are other critical realities that we in the West need to understand about the Islamic world. First, attempting to create barriers that separate Muslims from access to a given country or region is a fatally stupid idea in today’s global economy and a world with such rapid population growth. For at least the next quarter century, the Muslim world’s petroleum reserves and exports alone will force economic interdependence if the global economy is to grow and develop.

More broadly, however, a world divided against itself is far too dangerous to risk, and the demographic realities shaping the future are clear. A study by the Pew Trust entitled *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050* tracks in broad terms with the estimates of population growth by both the UN and the US Census Bureau.

The Pew study examines population growth by faith and projects that a largely peaceful and moderate Islam will grow some four times faster between 2010 and 2050 than the world’s other religions, and that the number of Muslims will grow from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.76 billion in 2050, or from 23.2% to 29.7% of the world’s total population – a growth the 73% over four decades.

Christianity is the only other truly global faith that will experience serious growth according to the Pew study, but it will only grow from 2.17 billion in 2010 to 2.92 billion in 2050, and stay at 31.4% of the world’s total population. This is a growth rate of 34%, roughly the same growth rate as Hindus will have in the much more narrow area of South Asia. The exact numbers are, of course, uncertain. The trends are not. In fact, the very idea the rest of the world can stand aside from a Muslims that make up 23% to 29% of the world’s entire population is absurd.

This is becomes even clearer if one looks beyond the Middle East and North Africa. Arabia may be the birthplace of Islam but it is not the center of the world’s Muslims. The Pew Trust estimates that the MENA region had 317 million Muslims in 2010 (93%), and that the number will grow to over 551 million in 2050 (93.7%). The comparable figures for East Asia and the Pacific are 985 million Muslims in 2010 (24.3%) and 1,457 million in 2050(29.5%). The figures for Sub-Saharan Africa are 985 million Muslims in 2010 (30.2%) and 669 million in 2050 (35.2%).

The growth rates for Europe and the United States are far more limited, but the need for religious and cultural tolerance and understanding is not. The Pew Trust estimates that the population of Europe will drop from 742.6 million in 2010 to 696.3 million in 2050. Europe had 44 million Muslims in 2010 (5.9%) and that the number will grow to 71 million in 2050 (10.2%) in spite of the overall drop in population.

The Pew Trust estimates that the population of North America will rise from 344.5 million in 2010 to 435.4 million in 2050. North America had 4.4 million Muslims in 2010 (1.0%) and the number will grow to over 10 million in 2050 (2.4%) in spite of the fact that largely Christian Latinos and Hispanics will be the key source of population growth.
Focusing on the Key Threat

This has already been a “bad” year for terrorism by historical standards, but the scale of the threat is often grossly exaggerated in the way these horrifying incidents have been covered in some media, and by what has become a counterterrorism industry that profits from each new attack and threat. If one looks back at the West before World War II, fascism and communism were mass movement by comparison and ones that help trigger a global conflict.

In contrast, while the number of foreign volunteers is often cited as if it was support of a mass movement, estimates of the numbers of ISIS fighters have never consistently risen above a peak of 60,000, and the range goes significantly lower – with some estimates of the low end down to 31,000. If one looks at the estimated source of foreign fighters, the data are even more uncertain and suspect. Most estimates, however, put the largest source of fighters as coming from Tunisia, not some country with a largely Islamist education system.

Most such studies do not attempt to show how the number of estimated fighters tracks with the total population, but a now dated estimate by the BBC put the number of Tunisian fighters at only 272 per million of population. (BBC, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034) The next ranking source in total size was Saudi Arabia, but it was only 86 per million. In contrast, a far less Islamist Jordan had 189 per million, and a diverse Lebanon had 155 per million. In any case, all of these estimates are in the noise level relative to the total population and the number of young males in what seems to be the most vulnerable age group.

Moreover, if one looks at the equally uncertain estimates of fighters for the Taliban and Haqqani Network in Afghanistan, the number of fighters or active terrorists in Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), or the number of fighters in the various Islamist extremist groups in Pakistan that do not have covert government support from elements like the ISI, the numbers are equally low. They are all very serious threats, and have all done immense damage to their respective countries. But, they do not speak for their respective peoples or for Islam in any statistically significant way.

It is also important to keep their threat in a broader perspective. Largely because the United States and other Western nations have helped allied governments in largely Muslim states, the threat in the United States and Europe has been limited. So far, the cells and networks that have emerged have been small and limited in capability. Some of the worst attacks have been by lone wolves or very small groups with no formal ties or links to an outside group.

Tracing even the key aspects of the various trends involved requires a detailed examination of several different databases, and a wide range of polls and counterterrorism studies. They are illustrated, in summary form, however, in a new Burke Chair report entitled The Uncertain Trends and Metrics of Terrorism in 2016, which is available of the CSIS web site at https://www.csis.org/analysis/uncertain-trends-and-metrics-terrorism-2016.

Bad as 2016 has been in some ways, this report shows that an estimate by IHS Jane’s, published in the July 17, 2016 edition of the Washington Post, showed that there were
658 deaths from all 46 terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States between January 1, 2015 and July 16, 2016, and 28,031 deaths from 2,063 attacks in the rest of the world. These figures seem to include the casualties from the fighting in insurgencies where calling the insurgents “terrorists” is more an exercise in rhetoric than accurate, and it is important to note that the main source of casualties and human suffering in the entire MENA region has been the acts of the Assad regime in fighting its Arab rebels rather than the result of actions by terrorist groups.

The data available on the START websites — the database used by the State Department in its annual report on counterterrorism seems to provide a more credible total of the maximum impact of actual terrorism. These data show that there were a maximum 253 terrorist incidents in North America between 2010 and 2015, and 127 in the United States. There were 7,210 in all of Europe, including Russia and Eastern Europe, 22,953 in the MENA region, 22,077 in South Asia, and 7,210 in the Sub-Saharan region. The numbers are very different, but the message is clear. The threat is far greater largely Muslim areas than in the threat extremists pose to the West.

There are broad problems in such data, and in the broader survey of the trends in terrorism referenced earlier. But, if sources and details of such such data are examined in detail — along with the chronologies they are based upon -- they are still accurate enough to communicate several messages about the threat of terrorism that we in the West need to learn:

- First, the overwhelming mass of terrorist attacks that have any links to Islamist extremist groups occur in states where Muslims are fighting Muslims. They also are a mix of Islamist groups fighting more secular governments, and Islamists fighting other Islamist groups or Muslim sects. Small, non-Muslim minorities have sometimes suffered badly, but almost all such terrorism (and insurgent violence) is a clash within a civilization, not between Islam and the outside world, and almost all of the violence is a struggle for the future of Islam between Muslims.

- Second, the data show that is far better to be able to fight terrorism outside the U.S. and Europe than within them. Having key allies and anti-terrorist governments in Muslim countries like Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE — and elements in Libya and Syria — really matters.

- Third, impressive as the total number of deaths and incidents may be, when they are examined by country and event, they are largely individual attacks that do not indicate a pattern of large scale movements with the exception of ISIS and the Taliban, and polls of Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan do not show that such movements have mass support.

- Finally, the chronologies show on a regional and country-by-country basis that networks are limited unless groups like the ISIS and the Taliban have de facto sanctuaries or something approaching a protostates, or have covert government support as in the case of Pakistan. By and large, terrorist cells and networks are far more rare and less effective than many feared after 9/11, and have less popular support.
The Problem with Fear Itself

There are no guarantees, however, that these conditions will continue if we Europe react to events by giving way to fear, by treating our Muslim populations with hostility or repressive security measures, by weakening our alliances with largely Muslim states, or by focusing only on the threat rather than helping Muslim states address its causes.

The greatest single threat posed by the recent cycle of terrorist attacks is that they will lead to the kind of fear that will create a growing separation between the West and the Muslim world — creating a real “clash of civilizations.” It is that we in the West will exaggerating the real world risks of terrorism, react out of prejudice and ignorance, and attempt to fight extremist terrorism with extremist counterterrorism. The only result will be a steady rise in extremist violence that driven by anger and alienation on all sides.

This risk so far seems limited, but the growth of anti-Islamist rhetoric in Europe and the United States -- and the steady tightening of security efforts that are sometimes driven more by politics than need -- are a warning. So are the past series of polls of Islamic countries that measure support for Sharia, or that ask about sympathy or support for extremist movements. The results vary from poll-to-poll but they warn all too clearly that popular support in the Muslim world could shift strikingly in favor of extremism if the West was really perceived as hostile to Islam on a broader basis.

To return to the points made at the start of this analysis, our answer to fighting extremism cannot be based on exaggerating the threat, pretending we do not have to live with continuing attacks, trying to isolate Muslims or the Muslim world, or treating terrorism as if counterterrorism was enough. We need to accept the continuing challenge. Containment, deterrence, a focusing on effective counterterrorism, partnerships with Muslim states, and educating Western populations about the true nature of Islam are all tools that look beyond fear towards real progress. So is simply keeping the threat in proportion rather than hyping every incident and focusing on terrorism to the exclusion of other threats and problems.

And, we must do far more to try to help regional states move towards reform and addressing the causes of terrorism. The forces that are shaping unrest and violence in much of the Islamic world are far too serious to ignore. As the uprisings of 2011 have shown all too clearly, they can breed civil war and shatter national development efforts. Nations cannot be built from the outside, but they can be helped from the outside, and that help will be as critical in themed-term to long run as any aspect of counterterrorism.

Other studies of IISS and the threat of terrorism:


- **Clash For Civilization: Creating an Effective Partnership in Fighting Extremism Between the West and the Muslim World**: [https://www.csis.org/analysis/clash-civilization](https://www.csis.org/analysis/clash-civilization)