

We Will Defeat Radical Jihadist Terrorism¹

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November 23, 2015

In recent weeks we have been appalled and saddened by the multiple murders carried out by Islamic jihadists in Israel, in Paris and elsewhere in Europe, in the Middle East and in Africa. We mourn those losses. We must urge our leaders to join with leaders of the civilized world to defeat these enemies of the basic human values we share, while at the same time we preserve and maintain those values ourselves.

After a major terrorist attack, every society faces a choice between fear and resolve. The world's great democracies cannot sacrifice our values or turn our backs on those in need. Therefore, we must choose resolve and we must lead the world to meet this threat.

The murderers operate across three mutually reinforcing dimensions. They have established for the time being a physical enclave in Iraq and Syria they call "ISIS." They work within an international terrorist network. And they seek to recruit followers through the international ideological movement of radical jihadism supported by a minority of Muslims and through sophisticated uses of social media. We have to target and defeat them in all three of these dimensions. Our goals are not to deter or contain ISIS and similar terrorist groups. Our goals are to defeat and destroy them.

An immediate war against an urgent enemy and a generational struggle against an ideology with deep roots will not be easily won. This is a worldwide fight, and American must lead it.

Our strategy should have three main elements:

1. Defeat ISIS in Syria, Iraq and across the Middle East;
2. Disrupt and dismantle the growing terrorist infrastructure that facilitates the flow of fighters, financing arms and propaganda around the world; and
3. Harden our defenses and those of our allies against external and homegrown threats.

Defeat ISIS Locally

To defeat ISIS locally we need a more effective coalition air campaign, with more allied planes, more strikes and a broader target set as well as increased support from the countries in the region. This in turn requires an immediate intelligence surge

¹ This paper is a compilation of ideas drawn from the best thinking I have found expressed by current candidates for President of the United States.

including technical assets, Arabic speakers with deep expertise in the Middle East and even closer partnership with regional intelligence services. To support this campaign, Congress should swiftly pass an updated authorization to use military force.

Disrupt and Dismantle Global Terrorist Infrastructure

Second, we must look beyond the immediate battlefield of Iraq and Syria to disrupt and dismantle the global terrorist infrastructure on the ground and online. Most urgent is stopping the flow of foreign fighters to and from the war zones of the Middle East. Thousands of recruits have flocked to Syria from western countries with western passports that facilitate crossing borders and returning home radicalized and battle hardened. The United States and our allies need to know and share the identities of every fighter who has traveled to Syria. We also need a greater focus on shutting down key enablers who arrange transportation, documents and more.

Radicalization and recruitment also happens online. There's no doubt we have to do a better job contesting online space, including websites and chat rooms where jihadists communicate with followers. We must deny them virtual territory just as we deny them actual territory.

Our government needs to recruit communication specialists fluent in Urdu, Arabic, Somali and other languages to do battle with extremists online. We need the same effort in the private sector. Social media companies must swiftly shut down terrorist accounts to prevent them being used to plan, provoke or celebrate violence.

We are in a contest of ideas against an ideology of hate, and we have to win. Islam itself is not our adversary. Muslims are peaceful and tolerant people. The overwhelming majority of Muslims have nothing whatsoever to do with terrorism and are appalled by it as we are. Indeed, many live in areas where they face far greater dangers from the radical jihadists than we do.

At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that there is a distorted and dangerous stream of extremism within the Muslim world that continues to spread. Its adherents are relatively few in number, but capable of causing profound damage, most especially to their own communities throughout an arc of instability that stretches from North and West Africa to Asia.

We have to join with our partners to do the patient and steady work of empowering moderates and marginalizing extremists; supporting democratic institutions and the rule of law; creating economic growth that supports stability; working to curb corruption; and helping training effective and accountable law enforcement, intelligence and counterterrorism services. As we do this, we must be building up a global counterterrorism infrastructure that is more active and adaptable than the terror networks we are trying to defeat.

At the end of the day, we still must be prepared to go after terrorists wherever they plot using all the tools at our disposal. That includes targeted strikes by U.S. military aircraft and drones, with proper safeguards when there are any other viable options to deal with continuing imminent threats.

All of this — stopping foreign fighters, blocking terrorist financing, doing battle in cyberspace — is vital to the war against ISIS, but it also lays the foundation for defusing and defeating the next threat and the one after that.

Harden Our Defenses And Those Of Our Allies

The third element of our strategy has to be hardening our defenses at home and helping our partners do the same against both external and home-grown threats.

After 9/11, the United States made a lot of progress breaking down bureaucratic barriers to allow for more and better information sharing among agencies responsible for keeping us safe.

We still have work to do on this front, but by comparison, Europe is way behind. Today, European nations do not even always alert each other when they turn away a suspected jihadist at the border, or when a passport is stolen. After many terrorist attacks we learn that the perpetrators were known to some security service or another, but too often the dots never get connected.

The United States must work with Europe to improve intelligence sharing and counterterrorism coordination and we must bring about this improvement dramatically and without delay. European countries also should have the flexibility to enhance their border controls when circumstances warrant.

In the United States we face a number of our own challenges. The threat to airline security is evolving as terrorists develop new devices like nonmetallic bombs. So our defenses have to stay at least one step ahead. We know that intelligence gathered and shared by local law enforcement officers is absolutely critical to breaking up plots and preventing attacks. So they need all the resources and support we can give them.

Law enforcement also needs the trust of residents and communities, including in our own country Muslim Americans. Now, this should go without saying, but in the current climate, it bears repeating. Muslim Americans are working every day on the front lines of the fight against radicalization.

Another challenge is how to strike the right balance of protecting privacy and security. Encryption of mobile communications presents a particularly tough problem. We should take the concerns of law enforcement and counterterrorism professionals seriously. They have warned that impenetrable encryption may prevent them from accessing terrorist communications and preventing a future attack. On the other hand, we know there are legitimate concerns about government intrusion, network security,

and creating new vulnerabilities that bad actors can and would exploit. So we need Silicon Valley not to view government as its adversary. We need to challenge our best minds in the private sector to work with our best minds in the public sector to develop solutions that will both keep us safe and protect our privacy.

In recent weeks no homeland security challenge is being more hotly debated than how to handle Syrian refugees seeking safety in the United States. Our highest priority, of course, must always be protecting the American people. We must continue to be vigilant in screening and vetting any refugees from Syria, guided by the best judgment. But we cannot allow terrorists to intimidate us into abandoning our values and our humanitarian obligations. Turning away orphans, applying a religious test, discriminating against Muslims, slamming the door on every Syrian refugee, that is just not who we are. We are better than that.

Many of these refugees are fleeing the same terrorists who threaten us. It would be a cruel irony if ISIS could force families from their homes and then also prevent them from finding new ones. We should be doing more to ease this humanitarian crisis, not less. We should lead the international community in organizing a donor conference and supporting countries like Jordan who are sheltering the majority of refugees fleeing Syria.

Conclusion

The United States and our allies must demonstrate that free people and free markets are still the hope of humanity. The jihadis will never understand and never defeat the power of a free people acting in accordance with the highest values of the civilized world.

Let us resolve that we will do all we can to lead the world against this threat that threatens people everywhere.