



October 31, 2016

USA TODAY

Brace for Terrorism Ripples from Mosul

By Matt A. Mayer & Michael P. Downing

The Islamic State is suffering setbacks in Syria and Iraq, especially as the Iraqi government [reasserts control](#) of Mosul, which is good news. But the advances also mean that many foreign fighters are expected to [return to Europe](#), where they will join a group that represents a less publicized threat to the West: thousands of frustrated fighters who wanted to go to the war zones but couldn't.

At recent security briefings in England, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, government officials told us time and again about a growing threat from what they estimate will be 1,500 returning and 10,000 frustrated fighters. The "[Uberization](#)" of terrorism adopted by ISIL and its adherents makes this threat ever-present, widely dispersed, and inevitably headed to America.

The ability of European intelligence agencies to identify and monitor these individuals is lacking due to a shortage of trained personnel and the rapid adoption of encryption technology shielding their activities. Pessimism among security groups runs high.

It also is clear European security organizations know very little about the [million-plus migrants](#) who poured into Europe over the last two years. Other than [taking fingerprints](#) of the majority of migrants, our briefers told us, there is little certainty that the identities given by the migrants during processing are in fact real.

Another weakness arises from the lack of effective outreach to the Muslim diaspora in Europe. With too many neighborhoods where radical imams lure disaffected and alienated young Muslims, opportunities to gain insights from the communities remain sparse. More needs to be done to integrate balkanized communities, enable them to adopt a national identity, and move from victim to stakeholder mentalities. The development of "[off-ramps](#)" from the radicalization path for those at risk would be a start.

These various elements provide us with insights — hopefully used by the next president — to drive reforms in the United States before the wave fully hits our shores.

First, we must acknowledge the simple reality that if Europeans don't know something, we likely don't either. With more than [10,000 individuals flagged as radicalized](#) in France alone, plus a percentage of unidentified migrants in Europe, official documentation such as identification cards and passports is highly susceptible to fraud. Once obtained, these documents will allow travel to Central and South

America under current visa policy where the drug cartels and human traffickers can ferry them across our southern border.

In the last two years, U.S. border authorities have seen an increase in the apprehension of [individuals from 35 countries](#) in the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. We cannot view this as a single threat, as the sharing of logistics, financing, recruitment, and migration routes for transnational organized crime need to be part of the counter strategy.

Terrorists also could come to the U.S. [directly through the Visa Waiver Program](#), which allows visa-free travel for many European citizens. With so much of our security dependent on European vetting processes, it is critical that we reform our visa programs to ensure the highest screening possible. To prevent the next bomber from boarding a plane, we need as much data in our hands as possible, as early as possible.

Officials at our intelligence briefings estimated that encryption now shrouds more than 90% of communication among terrorists, underscoring the need to [expand our use of human intelligence](#) by local law enforcement. The Los Angeles Police Department program serves as a strong model, balancing the use of human intelligence to monitor, surveil, and engage in undercover work with the protection of civil liberties. If terrorists are going to go dark via encryption, we must fund human intelligence to increase our odds of detecting their activities.

Finally, as we recently saw [with the New York City attack](#) and [in San Bernardino](#), family, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances could have known something about what the terrorists were planning to do. It is possible to counter the message the Islamic State is sending to America by [building strong trusting relationships](#) between law enforcement personnel and local Muslim communities.

In the age of terrorism, there simply are no calm ponds. The ripple that is hitting Europe today will hit America tomorrow. The sooner we can learn from what is happening in Europe, the better we can reform our domestic security apparatus to minimize the impact of that ripple. As the core leadership of the Islamic State is marginalized, the adversary will continue to decentralize.

To meet this threat, we also need to decentralize by empowering local law enforcement.

Matt A. Mayer is President of Opportunity Ohio and Author of "Taxpayers Don't Stand a Chance" and Michael P. Downing is the Deputy Chief and Commanding Officer, Counter-Terrorism and Special Operations Bureau with the Los Angeles Police Department.
