



Defeating terrorism requires both local law enforcement and the Muslim community

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Shortly after the New York City bombing last month, the [Wall Street Journal reported](http://www.wsj.com/articles/chelsea-bombing-witnesses-wanted-by-authorities-1474478760) (www.wsj.com/articles/chelsea-bombing-witnesses-wanted-by-authorities-1474478760) that terrorist Ahmad Rahami tested his bombs in his backyard, with a video clip of a test obtained from a relative. This report comes on the heels of the [neighbor in San Bernardino](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3344736/Neighbors-Saudi-husband-wife-San-Bernardino-shooters-noticed-acting-suspiciously-did-NOT-report-fear-racial-profiling.html) (www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3344736/Neighbors-Saudi-husband-wife-San-Bernardino-shooters-noticed-acting-suspiciously-did-NOT-report-fear-racial-profiling.html) who saw what he believed was suspicious behavior at the home of Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik. Behavior, unfortunately, that the neighbor did not report to local law enforcement or the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).



(https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/RTSOFOO_chelsea_nyc_bombing-e1475588042104.jpg)

Police officers stand guard while law enforcement officers search an address during an investigation into Ahmad Khan Rahami, in Elizabethm New Jersey, September 19, 2016. REUTERS/Eduardo Munoz.

On a recent security briefing trip to Europe, I learned that experts believe the Brussels bombers spent roughly a month making more than 150 kilograms of triacetone triperoxide. It is [highly likely at least one of their neighbors detected the strange odors](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/24/world/europe/brussels-explosives-tatp.html?_r=0) (http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/24/world/europe/brussels-explosives-tatp.html?_r=0). Even after the Paris bombing, ringleader [Salah Abdelsam allegedly moved around Brussels, especially in the Molenbeek neighborhood](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/salah-abdeslam-isis-suspicious-pizza-order-led-police-to-paris-attackers-hideout-at-molenbeek-flat-a6941111.html) (http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/salah-abdeslam-isis-suspicious-pizza-order-led-police-to-paris-attackers-hideout-at-molenbeek-flat-a6941111.html), where he was hid by family. In neither case did anyone reach out to law enforcement to report these occurrences.

Western governments face a simple mathematics problem when it comes to terrorism: law enforcement

doesn't have enough personnel to identify, monitor, and track all of the potential terrorists in Europe and America. Ultimately, our ability to detect and stop many future terrorists attacks will depend on cooperation from the Muslim community and, to a lesser extent, non-Muslim neighbors and coworkers. This cooperation must begin well before a potential terrorist has become fully radicalized and fully mobilized.

To increase this cooperation, we must engage in far more outreach to the Muslim communities across Europe and America than we currently do. This activity is a long-term commitment for law enforcement, as it will take time to breakdown walls, demonstrate sincerity, and build trust. Keep in mind, many Muslim immigrants to Europe and America come from countries in which law enforcement was corrupt and to be avoided at all costs. The first step, therefore, is to change how they see law enforcement. Given local law enforcement's long experience in community policing, they are ideally suited to head this outreach effort versus the FBI.

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Next, it will take more than going through the motions. Law enforcement must separate intelligence from outreach, as each will compromise the other rendering both ineffective. Outreach to the Muslim community can't be done with the wolf dressed in sheep's skin. It needs to be done by personnel fully engaged each and every day in the activity of getting to know local leaders, families, and businesses where the seeds of trust can be planted and grow.

Finally, once trust is established, it must be kept by demonstrating repeatedly that cooperation with law enforcement to build off-ramps for those members of the community on the pathway to radicalization is the best way to keep their sons and daughters out of jail or from becoming another name on the evening news. Until Muslim relatives and community members believe that reaching out to local law enforcement will be met with help not handcuffs, we will be engaged in a Sisyphean task.

I've outlined a [plan to create Regional Outreach Groups](https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Create-Regional-Outreach-Groups.pdf) (<https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Create-Regional-Outreach-Groups.pdf>) in the higher risk cities across America for the very purpose discussed above, which can be imitated in Europe. The sooner we dedicate some of our finite resources to this mission, the quicker we will bring the vast majority of Muslims, who want nothing to do with terrorism, into the fold to help defeat the evil forces that are corrupting their communities. We can't win a battle of attrition.

Learn more: [Create Regional Outreach Groups to Establish Connections and Build Trust](https://www.aei.org/publication/create-regional-outreach-groups-to-establish-connections-and-build-trust/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/create-regional-outreach-groups-to-establish-connections-and-build-trust/>) | [Let's remember 9/11 by taking action, not talking](https://www.aei.org/publication/lets-remember-911-by-taking-action-not-talking/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/lets-remember-911-by-taking-action-not-talking/>) | [New national terrorism strategy a step in the right direction](https://www.aei.org/publication/new-national-terrorism-strategy-a-step-in-the-right-direction/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/new-national-terrorism-strategy-a-step-in-the-right-direction/>)

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