



Four weeks until we elect tomorrow's terrorism agenda

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During the presidential debates, little to no time was spent talking about what each candidate would do domestically to secure America. While we continue to face the threat of complex, catastrophic attacks like 9/11, we increasingly face the threat of small cell and lone wolf terrorism enabled or inspired by ISIS and al Qaeda. Our domestic national security apparatus was constructed after 9/11 to deal with the former. We now need to make reforms to handle the latter.



(<https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/RTSRJ5A-e1476210533217.jpg>)

The presidential town hall debate, Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, October 9, 2016. REUTERS/Lucy Nicholson.

These reforms must not just address the threats we see, but also must evolve to meet the threats we believe are growing just over the horizon. Today, we are focused on the 1,500 foreign fighters trying to return to Europe and America and the 10,000 frustrated fighters who never left. Yet, over the horizon are [the children raised in ISIS-controlled areas](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/for-the-children-of-isis-target-practice-starts-at-age-6-by-their-teens-theyre-ready-to-be-suicide-bombers/2016/10/06/3b59f0fc-8664-11e6-92c2-14b64f3d453f_story.html) (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/for-the-children-of-isis-target-practice-starts-at-age-6-by-their-teens-theyre-ready-to-be-suicide-bombers/2016/10/06/3b59f0fc-8664-11e6-92c2-14b64f3d453f_story.html) and the threat they will present in the coming years.

At least 2 million children younger than 15 have lived under the rule of ISIS, and they are “a profoundly traumatized population...exposed not only to the ravages of war but also to countless acts of unspeakable cruelty.” Sadly, some “ended up in the terrorist group’s schools and training camps, where they were force-fed a diet of Islamic State ideology and gory videos. Isolated from their families, they were taught to shoot rifles and throw grenades, and were

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encouraged to volunteer as suicide bombers, a role extolled by their instructors as the highest calling for any pious Muslim youth.”

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Too many of them won't get the help they need and will become tomorrow's terrorists. Our next president will drive how America's domestic national security apparatus protects us over the next four-to-eight years when these ISIS children have become teenagers and young adults. Hillary Clinton [lists four bullets](https://www.hillaryclinton.com/issues/combating-terrorism/) (<https://www.hillaryclinton.com/issues/combating-terrorism/>) on how she will “harden our defenses at home”:

Supporting first responders, law enforcement, and intelligence officers with the right tools, resources, intelligence, and training to prevent attacks before they happen;

Launching an intelligence surge to get security officials the tools they need to prevent attacks;

Keeping assault weapons and other tools of terror out of terrorists' hands by allowing the FBI to stop gun sales to suspected terrorists, enacting comprehensive background checks, and keeping military-style assault weapons off our streets; and

Supporting law enforcement to build trustful and strong relationships with American Muslim communities. We need every American community invested in this fight, not fearful and sitting on the sidelines.

What tools and resources does she mean? How would she support law enforcement and what does she want them to do exactly? The Obama administration largely has kept the domestic framework developed by President George W. Bush, with additional work on countering violent extremism. Will Clinton follow in President Obama's footsteps?

As for Donald Trump, he [gave a national security speech](https://assets.donaldjtrump.com/DJT_Radical_Islam_Speech.pdf) (https://assets.donaldjtrump.com/DJT_Radical_Islam_Speech.pdf) that partially focused on two domestic national security issues:

We should only admit into this country those who share our values and respect our people [by] screening out all members or sympathizers of terrorist groups [and] screen out any who have hostile attitudes towards our country or its principles – or who believe that Sharia law should supplant American law. Those who do not believe in our Constitution, or who support bigotry and hatred, will not be admitted for immigration into the country.

Establish a Commission on Radical Islam – which will include reformist voices in the Muslim community who will hopefully work with us. We want to build bridges and erase divisions. The goal of the commission will be to identify and explain to the American public the core convictions and beliefs of Radical Islam, to identify the warning signs of radicalization, and to expose the networks in our society that support radicalization.

As with Trump's immigration screening proposal, the details of how this process works are critical, as such a process must be thorough enough to detect bad apples, but still respect civil liberties and constitutional rights. The Commission on Radical Islam is missing a vital element: increasing the trust between Muslims and law enforcement on the local level and providing channels for cooperation. Unfortunately, Trump hasn't addressed the intelligence aspect of our domestic security. As with much of Trump's policy agenda, we likely won't know exactly what he wants to do until well after the election.

As I've [testified to Congress](https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Mayer_Testimony_091416.pdf) (https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Mayer_Testimony_091416.pdf), the next president should institute five key reforms [highlighted in AEI's Homeland Security Reform Series](https://www.aei.org/feature/homeland-security-reform-series/) (<https://www.aei.org/feature/homeland-security-reform-series/>):

- Create a [national commission on terrorists' use of technology](https://www.aei.org/publication/national-commission-on-terrorists-use-of-technology-is-needed/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/national-commission-on-terrorists-use-of-technology-is-needed/>) to quickly gather and analyze data from law enforcement and technology companies on how terrorists are using technology, especially encryption, to recruit soldiers, to communicate information, and to plan and execute terrorist attacks. The commission would provide recommendations to policymakers on enacting reforms that would help law enforcement keep us safe, preserve the rights of the private sector to provide goods and services to consumers, and protect our civil liberties.

- Consolidate [domestic intelligence entities under the FBI](https://www.aei.org/publication/consolidate-domestic-intelligence-entities-under-the-fbi/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/consolidate-domestic-intelligence-entities-under-the-fbi/>) to ensure that information and intelligence work being done by local, state, and federal law enforcement entities is done together under one roof. We can ill afford for information or intelligence to reside in siloed places in cities across America where it could be missed, thereby undermining our ability to see the whole picture.
- Give [states and localities a voice in Washington](https://www.aei.org/publication/giving-states-and-localities-a-voice-in-washington/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/giving-states-and-localities-a-voice-in-washington/>) so that our security policies going forward are truly national instead of just federal. All too often, our national security policies don't reflect the deep experiences and resources possessed by state and local law enforcement and first responders. Giving those entities permanent seats in the national security policymaking process will increase the validity and fidelity of the policies created in Washington.
- Enhance our [human intelligence activities in local law enforcement](https://www.aei.org/publication/enhanced-human-intelligence-is-key-to-defeating-terrorists/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/enhanced-human-intelligence-is-key-to-defeating-terrorists/>) to help overcome the use of technology by terrorist and the increasingly covert ways terrorists now act. By directing homeland security grant funding to bolstering the monitoring, surveillance, and undercover activities in the higher risk cities across America, we can increase our chances of detecting small cell and lone wolf terrorists in our midst.
- Develop [regional outreach groups in key jurisdictions to build connections and 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/>) between law enforcement and Muslim communities. These regional outreach groups must not be aimed at collecting intelligence, but must be sincere efforts aimed at breaking down barriers, eliminating suspicions, and keeping communication channels open.

Both candidates touch on some of these reforms, but not with the details necessary for voters to truly understand what they would do over the next four-to-eight years to ensure that we detect and stop the terrorists coming at us today and over the next decade. Perhaps moderators of the third debate will move the candidates from attacking each other to filling in the details missing from their plans. Given that American lives are at stake, we deserve to know.

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/>) | [Defeating terrorism requires both local law enforcement and the Muslim community](https://www.aei.org/publication/defeating-terrorism-requires-both-local-law-enforcement-and-the-muslim-community/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/defeating-terrorism-requires-both-local-law-enforcement-and-the-muslim-community/>) | [Let's remember 9/11 by taking action, not talking](https://www.aei.org/publication/lets-remember-9-11-by-taking-action-not-talking/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/lets-remember-9-11-by-taking-action-not-talking/>)

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