

Ms. Bridget Matty about countering terrorism

Ms. Bridget Matty is a Domestic Representative U.S. National Counterterrorism Center. She spoke at Utah Valley University as a part of the National Security Studies program on August 29, 2018. She previously was on the White House Security Council. She helped tailor the program to fight radicalization in the US. The first point she brings up is how they see terrorism. How it is perceived. They almost exclusively combat international terrorism, not just within the US. In 2001, the big concentration of threat was mostly just in Afghanistan and a little bit of Pakistan. It has since spread around the globe, and have grown in size and to different regions. From 2010 to 2015 there was a lot of terrorism Recruiting propaganda on the internet. Up until this point, people did not think Americans were being recruited to terrorism. At this time, the biggest threats were Al-Qa'ida and a few others, then the emergence of HVE (Homegrown Phenomenon). The latter one means people who radicalized while here in the US.

Then in 2014 a new group that radicalized from Al-Qa'ida in Iraq that we know as ISIS they refer to themselves as 'The Islamic State'. About 39,000 people traveled from parts around the world to join ISIS. 40 of them are Americans that have died; there are a number we might not know about. At least 5,600 of this number were from the west. We do not have an official number of Americans in ISIS. It seems many Easter European states had many fighters leave and come back, as well as Tunisia. ISIS only controls now 3% of the territory it once held at its peak during 2014. The reasons for their now apparent weakness is: Shrunken talent pool, CT pressure outside battlefield, Ideological rifts among leaders, Losing lots of oil money, and tax sources. The goal has been to make ISIS to WASWAS. Attacks now have been on smaller scales, but with big repercussions. Territorial loss does not mean loss of influence.

Platforms that all of us use (social media, etc.) have many heavy influences of terrorism and terrorism recruiting. There were 40 attacks in Europe last year and three of them were people who left and came back, and accounted for most of the fatalities. So they have more quality of attacks not necessarily quantity. The present and biggest threat to the US is the Homegrown Violent Extremism. 159 people have been arrested in the US since 2014. 102 of these have pleaded or been found guilty. There average length of sentence is 13.2 years. Minors and teenagers involvement in terrorism is starting to increase, which is very alarming. While this is a big threat, and ISIS has mostly been defeated, we cannot forget about Al-Qa'ida. Its members sought refuge in Syria, and they are starting a resurgence. Another threat is Hezbollah, which is direct partners with Iran: it also backs Assad. Last year 2 Hezbollah operatives were arrested in the US.

The NCTC gets intelligence from all the different agencies. All other have their specific scope, but they get to look at all of it, collect it, and then re disperse it to the agencies. They specifically do terrorism analysis. They also will brief the president and others on the latest intel of terrorism leads. They have been able to break down and make a plan for agents to use to look for mobilization indicators or terrorism.

So now, what has changed since 9/11? Like she said earlier, it is looking for all the homegrown threats that are happening. There is a clear role for the US public in combating the homegrown threats, from see something say something, to helping people get away from the track of radicalization.

Jesse Sandstrom, UVU student