

NCTC Presentation at Utah Valley University



(L to R) Ms. Bridget Matty, Ryan Vogel and Ryan Griffith during Presentation

On August 29, 2018, Ryan Vogel, the Director of National Security Studies at Utah Valley University (UVU) hosted a presentation by Ms. Bridget Matty, the Domestic Representative for the US Counterterrorism Center or in short NCTC. The main focus and task of NCTC, according to their website¹ is to analyze, understand, and respond to terrorist threats. It is a hub for intelligence gathering and sharing between multiple agencies. This agency helps organize and provide critical information related to security. Held within their database is a list of all known and suspected terrorists which many agencies access daily. Objectivity is a requirement for NCTC and their employees, this is important to their success that they remain neutral with all parties. Building awareness outside government is also an objective in order to empower local communities. Representative Matty's main objective was to provide information about Al Qaeda, ISIS, and Hizballah and their level of influence while also teaching us about the agency, its purpose, and what it sees for the future of the terrorist threat.

¹ "ODNI Home." Home, www.dni.gov/index.php/nctc-what-we-do.

During the presentation she delivered a report on the security threats of major terrorist groups since 2014, when ISIS emerged as a splinter group from Al Qaeda. Being led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, its members quickly gained prominent influence in Iraq and Syria, their growth stimulated from a wide use of social media and propaganda to recruit individuals. ISIS recruited up 39,000 foreign fighters worldwide to join their efforts to establish a caliphate or rather an Islamic State, about 5,600 people were recruited from the West, in America specifically a total of 295 people attempted, travelled or were returned in their effort to join ISIS as result about 40 Americans have died while fighting for ISIS. Despite their success in recruitment and their media campaign, and their territorial gains ISIS certainly has been seriously weakened by coalition forces in recent years, major lengths of territory have been lost. ISIS has lost a large pool of talent most have been killed due to coalition efforts, they have also suffered from ideological rifts among prominent leaders. Ms. Matty a point that even if ISIS has large numbers, they are more concerned with those individuals who are trained and know what they do. The terror group has lost large quantities of oil resources and tax income from those territories they used to occupy. ISIS has been attributing any act of mass violence such as the Las Vegas shootings as being sponsored and organized by them, regardless of its origin. These efforts attach themselves to events that have no connection show their weakness and need for relevance. Despite these signs of weakness, the director of NCTC suggests that we still keep an eye on them, they are still committed to acts of violence, even now they are utilizing low tech methods of violence traditionally used by terror groups. The attempted caliphate still has a strong influence on the internet and as a result are attempting to continue to recruit and show propaganda in order to radicalize.

Ms. Matty explained while ISIS took much of our attention Al Qaeda has growing mostly in Afghanistan and Africa. Most of the areas they have occupied and grown are largely ungoverned areas of land. The other group she shared with us was Hizballah because they are recognized as terrorist organization, they have a global network, they perform acts of terror in the middle east, provide weapons and aid to countries in the middle east. They are actively supporting the Assad regime and are fighting for his government. They are well armed and organized and recruit regionally. Matty informed us that two Hizballah operatives were arrested in the US in 2017. This transitioned into a discussion about the rise of homegrown violent extremism (HVE), since 9/11 national security agencies have making strong efforts to curb terrorism grown from US soil. A fact was shared that the average age of those who are charged with extremism is 28 and 90% are males.

Matty explained that this has indicated an allurement of the ideology in minors and vulnerable youth.

Matty highlighted the importance of prevention, she stated that there is no single best deterrent strategy. In her opinion, local communities have played and will play a greater roles in prevention if given proper tools and information can provide a barrier to extremism. She said the proper way for the public to combat terrorism is to continue to be resilient so that we can deny them these groups their social and political goals. Much of what was discussed was very informative and factual which was very helpful as a student to grasp where and how these militant groups arose and what the international community is doing to resist them. Learning more about ISIS and rising influence of Al Qaeda was very helpful in bring me on track with current affairs. I learned that individuals who are interested in pursuing a career with NCTC should consider gathering technical skills. She explained to us that the NCTC is in high need for those with technical skills. Attending this meeting helped to provide me with a greater understanding of professional opportunities while helping to understand emerging threats.

Cody Conklin, UVU student