

National Counterterrorism Center Presentation at UVU By Ms. Matty



On Wednesday, August 29, the UVU National Security Studies department hosted Ms. Bridgett Matty from the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC). Ms. Bridgett Matty is a regional representative from the NCTC and she spoke on the current terrorism threats around the globe, the current state of counterterrorism in the U.S., the role they play in National Security, and the ultimate goals/mission of the National Counterterrorism Center.

She introduced her topic with some of the history of current terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS. After 9/11 and before 2014, Al-Qaeda and affiliates were the main focus of counterterrorism organizations. Soon, Al-Shabaab, AQAP, and others began to attract the attention of Americans. Homegrown Violent Extremism (HVE) phenomena began to emerge and foreign terrorist organizations quickly evolved and became more popular from the use of their internet-based platforms. In 2014, a radical branch broke off of Al-Qaeda, now known as ISIS, and formed their own terrorist group. They emerged as a significant global threat.

Matty continued her remarks about foreign fighters and coalition efforts. There are currently 39,000 foreign fighters worldwide, at least 5,600 from the West, and approximately 295 U.S. citizens who traveled, attempted, or returned to join ISIS. It has been estimated that about 40

Americans have died from attempting to do so. Because of the coalition efforts, ISIS now controls only 3% of the territory it once controlled during their peak in August 2014. Due to weaknesses within the group, ISIS began experiencing reduced organizational strength. Members began abandoning ISIS, which shrunk the talent pool. They also experienced ideological rifts among leaders, counterterrorism pressure outside of the battlefield, and money loss from oil and taxation sources. Other groups unaffiliated groups claimed themselves to be the well-known terrorist group after violent attacks, regardless of the origin. All these factors including the coalition efforts against ISIS has led to the down-spiraling of the extremist terrorist group. The NCTC drew nearer to one of their almost “comedic” goals to make them go from ISIS to “WASWAS”. Even though ISIS has never completely been eradicated, their threat isn’t as powerful as it was in 2014 during the height of their attacks. During the obtrusive time of ISIS, Al-Qaeda was hypothetically put on the “back-burner” as they weren’t as much of a threat. Now, however, they are more geographically dispersed outside of Afghanistan and Pakistan and they are making a comeback. Another terrorist group that has emerged and caught the attention of many is Hezbollah. Hezbollah partners with Iran, foments instability and promotes terrorism in Iranian neighborhoods, and fully supports Syrian President Assad.

Ms. Bridgett Matty expounded on the actual program and goals of the NCTC. She stated, “The National Counterterrorism Council is solely an information agency. We do not send out agents or deploy people.” There have also been many changes since the 9/11 terrorist attack on the twin towers in New York City. For instance, the clear threat levels from perpetrators have varied throughout the past 17 years, as has the clear role for the American public. The NCTC was formed after 9/11 and has undergone many internal changes within the organization as the years have gone on. They are always looking for ways to improve and better fight against the global terrorist threats. On December 25, 2009, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, popularly referred to as the “Underwear Bomber”, smuggled a bomb in his underwear aboard a commercial airline. Officials later determined this act was an Al Qaeda plot. After the incident, the NCTC formed a new branch called the Pursuit group to help prevent similar events.

In conclusion, Ms. Matty stated the effectiveness and progress the organization is making on a weekly basis. The hope for the future is to stay ahead in the game of global terrorism and prevent it as much as possible. Every day they are working on new ways and using new technologies and techniques to do just that so there is hope for the future in the world of international relations and counterterrorism.

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