

The Islamic State, Extremism, and the Spread of Transnational Terrorism

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Articles & Testimony

For many at-risk Muslims in Europe, the Islamic State provided the opportunity to be a part of building something exciting, and local authorities are now dealing with the consequences of this recruitment wave.

The following is an excerpt from Dr. Levitt's prepared remarks. To read his full testimony, download the PDF.

When I met with the mayor of Molenbeek, she was frank about the task ahead in getting a handle on radicalization in the municipality but was equally blunt in describing the area as a victim of lack of government attention and investment. There is also confusion at the government level about how to handle the problem. Municipal authorities stressed that actual counterterrorism is the job of the Federal Police, who maintain a consolidated list of some 670 terrorist suspects, including people who have gone to fight in Syria and Iraq (and, more recently, Libya), returning foreign fighters, and individuals who seem inclined to become foreign terrorist fighters. A separate federal list focuses on priority criminal cases (due to the increasingly common links between the two, authorities plan to merge the two lists). According to local officials, the municipality has documented at least 85 cases of people who have been radicalized to terrorism, some of whom have left to join the Islamic State in Syria and others who have returned.

Following the Brussels bombings, authorities are laser-focused not only on finding all the perpetrators and their accomplices, but mapping out the network of Islamic State terrorists on the ground in Belgium. That will be no small task, but even that kind of counterterrorism success will only go so far towards reestablishing a sense of security in Belgium in particular and Europe more generally. Hardening targets, implementing greater border security measures, and enhancing intelligence collection and information sharing are critical and still subpar, but these tools will only help us contend with yesterday's threat; they won't help us get ahead of tomorrow's. The good news is that Belgian authorities have now realized the need to build a prevention program... ❖

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