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Attached is an article from the Atlantic magazine. It sets forth many issues about today's plague of global terrorism.

Like a Chinese menu take your choice to agree, disagree or embellish as you see fit

How Should the World Respond to Terrorism?

Terrorism is an old phenomenon. To figure out how to end it, it's worth sorting through what's changed, which precedents can inform future responses, and what past fai

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A&Q is a special series *that inverts the classic Q&A*, taking some of the most frequently posed solutions to pressing matters of policy and *exploring their complexity*.

March alone saw a string of major terrorist attacks around the world—including in Ivory Coast, Belgium, Pakistan, Iraq, and Turkey—that together killed more than 100 people. The drumbeat of attacks seems horrifyingly constant, and underscores the fact that nearly 15 years since the United States launched its so-called global war on terror, victory is nowhere in sight.

So what would it take? Why haven't the many counterterrorism policies tried in various countries around the world, ranging from major wars to tightened surveillance to Twitter counterpropaganda to outright repression, seemed to have made the problem less severe? Is it true, as *Foreign Policy* suggested recently, that when it comes to fighting terrorism, the international community is *out of ideas*? Or, with ISIS steadily losing territory in Iraq and Syria even as it lashes out at the West, is the current campaign to some degree working?

Terrorism is an old phenomenon, and it's one various countries around the world have absorbed and dealt with in various ways. In considering how to approach the current problem of terrorism around the world, it's worth asking what's really new about it, which precedents can inform future responses, and what past failures can teach for the way forward.

ANSWER

The problem of terrorism is getting worse worldwide.

QUESTION

Where? Since when? And by what measure?

Historically speaking, terrorism is rare, and mass-casualty terrorist attacks rarer still. In terms of the sheer *number* of individual attacks committed in, for example, the United States and Europe, terrorism has actually declined significantly from its 1970s peak. (At the time, left-wing and right-wing terrorist groups were active throughout Europe; the United States had a particular problem with Puerto Rican nationalists.)

The U.S. has been especially safe from terrorism since September 11; the highest-casualty terrorist attack in the country since then occurred in San Bernardino in 2015, and yielded a death toll of 14 people. Overall the death toll from terrorism in the United States from 2004 to 2014, the most recent decade for which data was available, was 56, far below the toll of the 1990s, when 218 people died in terrorist attacks in the United States, 168 of them killed in the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995.

Still, the number of terrorist incidents worldwide, and the number of fatalities they cause, has jumped alarmingly in recent years, driven largely by events in just five countries—Iraq, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria. As the State Department [reported](#) based on figures through 2014, “The number of terrorist attacks in 2014 increased 35 percent and total fatalities increased 81 percent compared to 2013,” partly due to the increasing lethality of some individual attacks. “In 2014, there were 20 attacks that killed more than 100 people, compared to two such attacks in 2013.”

On the other hand, no one really agrees on the definition of “terrorism”—there’s a reasonable degree of consensus that terrorism consists of politically motivated attacks by non-state actors, but it’s not clear where “terrorism” ends and acts of “insurgency” or “civil war” begin. As John Mueller and Mark Stewart [pointed out](#) recently: “[V]irtually any violence perpetrated by rebels in civil wars is now being called terrorism. ... Before 9/11, terrorism was, by definition, a limited phenomenon. ... If terroristic violence became really sustained and extensive in an area ... the activity was generally no longer called terrorism, but rather war or insurgency.” They concluded: “The post-9/11 conflation of insurgency with terrorism makes it seem that the world is awash in terrorism, something that stokes unjustified alarm outside war zones, where terrorism remains a quite limited hazard.”

Even with this expansive definition, less than 7 percent of violent deaths worldwide are the result of terrorism; as Micah Zenko [pointed out](#) in *Foreign Policy* last year, “Citizens of several Central American and Caribbean countries are still [more likely](#) to be the victim of homicide than Iraqis or Syrians are from terrorism.”

ANSWER

The key difference now is ISIS. Al-Qaeda was scary, but they never had their own quasi-state. For a terrorist group to rule this much territory is unprecedented.

QUESTION

In what way? Knowing whether ISIS is an unprecedented terrorist group once again crucially depends on defining “terrorism.” The basic tactic has been employed by any number of organizations throughout history. ISIS is not the first formerly ragtag guerrilla organization to violently occupy a great deal of territory; Mao Tse-Tung’s [communist fighters](#) used terrorism in the early stages of the Chinese civil war before overthrowing Chiang Kai-Shek’s nationalist government in 1949.

As a government, ISIS is not the first to impose brutally harsh rule on the people under its control—the Taliban in Afghanistan was known for many of the same practices, including beheadings and public executions, and the [current government](#) Saudi Arabia uses the tactics too. ISIS has shown an ability to export violence to civilians beyond its territory—countries from Iran to Cuba have done the same. And there is even recent precedent for a government based on a cult-like figure claiming divine qualities and intent on global domination. As the terrorism scholar Brian Michael Jenkins [pointed out](#) recently:

In 1881, when an Islamic cleric in what was then called ‘the Sudan,’ declared himself to be the Mahdi—the successor to the Prophet Muhammad and leader of a universal jihad that commanded the loyalty of all humankind—the alternative to obedience was death. The Mahdist State ended at the start of the twentieth century, its global ambitions never realized.

One thing ISIS does excel at is amplifying the perception of the threat it poses to Westerners, and Americans in particular. Actually killing Westerners is only a small part of how it does this. Terrorism “works” in part by drawing attention to the political cause that motivates it. Electronic media, including social media, magnify and spread this effect, and ISIS has proven adept at using it, from distributing horrifying

beheading videos to strategically claiming responsibility for attacks, such as the San Bernardino shooting, in which the attackers' direct links to ISIS are unclear.

The ISIS-inspired attacks Europe has seen recently show that the group isn't all talk. But it's worth remembering that this, too, we've seen before. In 1988, suspected Libyan intelligence agents [blew up](#) Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 259 people onboard and 11 on the ground. More recently, al-Qaeda has pulled off mass-casualty attacks in Europe, including the Madrid train bombings of 2004, which killed 192 people, and the London transportation bombings of 2005, which killed 56.

ANSWER

Right, but ISIS has a stated intention to continue attacking the West. If we do want to protect the West from terrorist attacks, we need to tackle terrorism at its root—in the Middle East.

QUESTION

Is the Middle East itself really *the* root of the terrorism problem for the West? Certainly, as European and American history shows, "terrorism" as a whole is not a Middle Eastern invention. Which is of course not to say that there aren't currently terrorists in the Middle East; ordinary Iraqis and Syrians are their primary victims.

But terrorist violence continues to take many forms around the world. In the United States, for example, "non-jihadist" terrorists have killed more people than jihadist terrorists in the years since 9/11. The New America Foundation [has tallied](#) up deaths from terrorism in the United States in the nearly 15 years since those attacks and found a total of 93. Forty-five of these were attributable to jihadist violence; 48 the organization classified as "far right-wing attacks," like the Charleston Church shooting of 2015. One of the worst mass-casualty attacks on European soil in recent years, prior to last year's Paris attacks, occurred in 2011, when Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 people, many of them children, in Norway after having, in the BBC's [words](#), "railed against what he saw as a Marxist Islamist takeover of Europe."

The New America analysis also shows that aspiring jihadist terrorists in the United States since 9/11 are, unlike the 2001 hijackers, almost never foreign invaders dispatched from overseas. Among people charged over the past decade and a half in the U.S. with crimes related to jihadist terrorism, the majority were American citizens, either U.S.-born or naturalized. The 2005 London bombings were carried British

citizens. The Paris attackers were mainly French and Belgian nationals. So proposals to restrict immigration as a solution to terrorism, for example, aren't actually directed at where much of the threat comes from.

ANSWER

But ISIS's leadership is based in the Middle East—specifically in Iraq and Syria. If we just kill ISIS caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his inner circle, the whole organization will collapse around him.

QUESTION

How much does ISIS depend on Baghdadi? He is hugely important as a spiritual leader within the organization and as [self-described commander of the faithful](#). But it's not clear how much he actually directs the group's day-to-day operations; last year, he was reported incapacitated in [an airstrike](#), and ISIS was able to make [significant territorial gains](#) even so. Moreover, ISIS's own propaganda [details](#) its strategy of giving fighters "complete tactical autonomy" and encourages "isolated actions of self-radicalized people, who have absolutely no direct contact with ISIS, and yet who consciously act in its name." These individuals don't necessarily need Baghdadi himself in order to conduct attacks.

There's also no clear answer to what happens when you remove the leader of a militant organization. The tactic has helped hasten the end of terrorist groups like Japan's Aum Shinrikyo and Peru's Shining Path; on the other hand, targeting the leaders of Hamas, as Israel has been doing for many years, has yet to break up that group. There are cases in which removing a group's leadership can actually increase the violence of its activities amid succession struggles or decreased discipline among rank-and-file fighters.

ANSWER

That implies that the real solution may be online. ISIS has attracted thousands of foreign fighters to its cause; what the U.S. needs really needs to do is battle ISIS's ability to spread its ideology on the Internet.

QUESTION

How do people get “radicalized” anyway? No one really knows how it happens, or to whom; one of the only things terrorism scholars agree on is that [there is no “profile”](#) of a typical terrorist. In an article examining the criminal backgrounds of some ISIS recruits in Europe, Joby Warrick and Greg Miller of *The Washington Post* noted that, while ISIS’s ideology certainly can inspire violence, sometimes the violence comes before ideology. They [wrote](#) that “some European officials say the perpetrators in the most recent attacks appear to be part of a new wave of recruits that are not ‘radical Islamists’ but rather ‘Islamized radicals’—people from society’s outer margins who feel at home with a terrorist organization noted for beheading hostages and executing unarmed civilians.”

Much has been made of ISIS’s ability to recruit and radicalize new members online. But here, too, it’s not always clear which way the causal relationship runs. No doubt ISIS appeals to audiences in a variety of ways—from emphasizing its [supposed Islamic utopia](#) to promoting gory videos. But what we know about the Paris and Brussels attackers emphasizes the importance of in-person relationships to recruitment. It’s not an accident that many of them came from the same neighborhoods in Brussels or were even related to each other.

Charlie Winter, a senior research associate at Georgia State University’s Transcultural Conflict and Violence Initiative, [told me recently](#), recruitment has more to do with relationships than with passive absorption of propaganda on Twitter. “I think regardless of whether they’re operating online or offline, these networks act in a similar way and they’re offering similar things,” he said, including a sense of belonging and commitment.

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The answers to terrorism aren’t easy, because the questions are hard.

What makes anybody pick up a weapon? There’s no one reason for everyone. What type of person does it? There’s no one type. What does ISIS really want? Depends on which member of ISIS you ask.

Still, the history of terrorism shows that various terrorist campaigns throughout history have ended, and the reasons vary. Sometimes they’ve ended through political negotiations, as when Northern Ireland’s Irish Republican Army agreed to relinquish its weapons in exchange for political representation. Sometimes they’ve ended through extensive policing and disruption of the leadership, as Italy’s Red Brigades did in the 1970s. And sometimes, the former “terrorists” actually win and gain political power, as Mao’s communists did in China.

Previous generations of terrorist groups have been defeated, even though in many cases the defeat has taken decades. Today's terrorist groups may have different goals, but why should they be any different in that respect? Alternatively, what happens if they win?