



## **Turning on American Muslims: A destructive response to terrorism**

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Partisan politics brings out the worst in some people. The response to this week's terrorist attacks in Belgium is no exception.

Republican Sen. Ted Cruz immediately proposed that local police departments “patrol and secure” Muslim neighborhoods throughout the country. Donald Trump agreed and said he was “100 per cent behind it.”

Trump said that, if torture had been used against captured terrorists, the Brussels bombings might have been prevented. Instead of expressing solidarity with our European allies, he suggested leaving NATO, because it is “too expensive.”

Cruz has been widely criticized for wanting to target a group of Americans because of their religious faith. New York City police commissioner William J. Bratton pointed out that more than 900 New York police officers are Muslim. Bratton said:

The statements he (Cruz) made today is why he's not going to be president of the country. I have over 900 very dedicated (Muslim) officers in this department, many of whom do double duty, and they serve as active duty members of the U.S. military in combat, something the senator has never seen. So before he starts denigrating any population, he should take a close look at what he's denigrating.

The Anti-Defamation League declared:

The overwhelming majority of Muslim-Americans are law abiding people who are as outraged by terrorism and bigotry as Americans of any other faith ... It is an irrational approach that harkens back to a dark and tragic chapter in American history—the relocation of more than 100,000 Japanese-Americans to internment camps during the Second World War. Simply because of their ethnicity.

The internment of Japanese-Americans is a policy that has been hailed as an example for the future by Donald Trump.

In the past, Cruz has vowed to preserve civil liberties, often discussing the importance of the Fourth Amendment and vowing to shrink government. Now, with his call for special government surveillance of Muslim neighborhoods, he seems to be backtracking.

“I think this is a reflection of his misunderstanding of civil liberties that you can start surveillance of people just because they belong to a group,” said Ron Paul, the former Texas congressman and a leader of the libertarian movement. “That’s something that’s done in a police state, and it’s not supposed to be done in this country.”

Critics, many of them conservatives, said Cruz’s proposal smacks of the bloated bureaucratic government programs that Cruz says he wants to eliminate. David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute, said, “Personally, I was troubled by it. It certainly sounds more intrusive—more big government, less effective than policies I’d like to see.”

The only Republican presidential candidate who had a normal, rational response to the terrorist attack in Belgium was Ohio Gov. John Kasich, who pointed out, “We are not at war with Islam. We are at war with radical Islam. In our country, we don’t want to create divisions.”

The Muslim community in the U.S. is well integrated into our society. We do not have isolated immigrant communities, in effect zones that can be ignored by local government, as in Belgium.

Instead, we have generations of a “melting pot” philosophy that assimilates and integrates immigrants into our society. Cruz’s father was an immigrant from Cuba. Trump’s mother was born in Scotland, his grandfather in Germany.

In Dearborn, Michigan, a predominantly Arab-American and Muslim community, the overwhelming majority of votes in the Democratic primary were for Bernie Sanders, the son of a Jewish immigrant from Poland. When it comes to integrating men and women from around the world into our society, we have a long and successful history.

Of Arab-Americans, President Obama declared:

We have an extraordinarily successful, patriotic, integrated Muslim-American community. They do not feel ghetto-ized. They do not feel isolated. And so any approach that would single them out or target them for discrimination is not only wrong and un-American, but it would also be counterproductive.

None of this is to say that we do not face real threats of terrorism within our own country. December saw an Islamic State-inspired mass shooting in San Bernardino, California. We know that our transit systems, particularly city subways, are vulnerable. Yet we are fortunate that we are not faced with the same volume of successful Islamic State recruiting as Belgium and France.

Seamus Hughes, deputy director at the program on extremism at George Washington University's Center for Cyber and Homeland Security, said, "In the U.S., for the most part, communities don't radicalize, individuals do."

According to a report from the Doufan Group, a research and intelligence service, 470 people from Belgium had traveled to Syria as of October with plans to join militant groups. That is the highest per capita number of Islamist fighters of any Western country.

Charles Kurzman, a sociology professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, tracks Muslim American terror suspects. He says that he has found only 42 who successfully traveled to join militants in Syria, Iraq or Libya. Of those, only 16 remain in military territory. Six were arrested and 20 died. Dozens have been prosecuted in the U.S.

Professor Hughes notes, "I think it's fair to say that Belgium authorities are overwhelmed with the numbers they're dealing with. They have twice the number of foreign fighters than we have people who have attempted to travel."

U.S. law enforcement is said to have a wide network of informants, and American Muslims, unlike some in Europe, are often involved in assisting authorities. The main problem facing law enforcement appears to be the individual who falls under the sway of ISIS propaganda and then decides to carry out an attack without any direction from abroad, according to authorities.

That was the case in San Bernardino, where a husband and wife pledged their allegiance to ISIS on Facebook and then killed 14 people and wounded 23. Most recently, the FBI said that a student at the University of California at Merced who stabbed four people was "self-radicalized" but did not have any ties to a terrorist group.

Belgium, it seems, is the perfect storm for ISIS and other terrorist group recruiting and organization.

Matthew Levitt is a former U.S. intelligence and counterterrorism official who now directs the Washington Institute's Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence. He recently returned from Brussels and reports that the country's open borders, lack of intelligence in isolated Muslim communities, and poor intelligence-sharing with European neighbors combine to create a dangerous situation.

Levitt says that the arrest the week before the Brussels bombings of Paris attack suspect Salah Abdeslam, who eluded capture for months, shows that "clearly there was a larger support network" than Belgian authorities anticipated.

Because of Europe's open borders, Belgium's terrorist cells are a real threat to its neighbors. In Europe, individual countries are only as strong as their most vulnerable neighbor. A country can have a strong surveillance network and counterterrorism machinery, but if a neighboring country

does not, it becomes a launchpad that can be exploited by groups that want to project terrorist attacks elsewhere.

Concern over the security of our own borders is a legitimate worry, as our borders have become increasingly porous.

In the wake of a very serious terrorist threat to ourselves and our allies, presidential candidates should seek to do something more than exacerbate public fears, score partisan points or actually put us in more danger through their rhetoric.

To win the war against radical Islamic terrorism, we need the support of the vast majority of Muslims who have only contempt for ISIS. They represent, after all, the largest number of its victims.

To speak of barring Muslims from the country, or increasing police surveillance of their neighborhoods, or torturing any suspects who fall into our hands, is to become a recruiting tool for ISIS.

Our war is against ISIS and terrorism, not Islam. Why is that so difficult for Donald Trump and Ted Cruz to understand?