



Donald Trump misses the point on ISIS and Islam

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During Sunday's presidential debate, an audience member asked the 2016 candidates a question about Islamophobia. In response, Republican presidential candidate **Donald Trump** stressed the importance of recognizing and solving radical Islamic terrorism. To do this, Trump explained, "We have to be sure that Muslims come in and report when they see something going on. When they see hatred going on, they have to report it."

Democratic candidate **Hillary Clinton** responded by calling his earlier position and rhetoric of banning Muslims "shortsighted" and "dangerous." Clinton explained that, "What Donald Trump says about Muslims is used to recruit fighters, because they want to create a war between us." And she is right. Ostracizing the Muslim community is fodder for ISIS propaganda.

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) operates under the veneer of religion. Although their propaganda perpetuates the falsehood that they are killing in the name of Allah, the reality is that most ISIS fighters are being exploited for the benefit of war profiteers and Godless opportunists. Islamic theologians around the world agree that **ISIS leadership manipulates the interpretation of the Quran** to fit its personal agenda and then disseminates this message through clever propaganda, charismatic speeches and intensive instruction/brainwashing. Targeting Muslims for the actions of ISIS fosters the perceived religious connection between ISIS and Islam, promoting their primary source of manipulated legitimacy.

Moreover, targeting people on the basis of Islamic religion is not an effective exercise for counterterrorism, considering that (1) ISIS is active in recruiting non-Muslim converts and (2) the vast majority of true Muslims are familiar enough with their religion to completely dismiss ISIS' manipulated interpretation of the Quran. In order to effectively combat ISIS and protect the world from their continued wrath, it is important for the presidential hopefuls to understand who exactly is being recruited into terrorism.

Prior to being conscripted, prospective extremists often aren't particularly religious and typically live on the margins of society. Recruiters target people who are in need to become their martyrs, and engage these prospects by temporarily filling — or simply making the false promise to fulfill — the needs in their life. For citizens of countries like Syria, Iraq and Tunisia, this means offering basic physiological sustenance to support their families: employment, food, money and/or safety from their wrath. For citizens of industrialized countries, like France, the United States, Canada and Australia, this means offering prospective recruits a sense of **belonging**, “**love**,” esteem and/or self-actualization.

Following the debate, many Muslim viewers on social media expressed that they felt Trump’s response was Islamophobic. Rhetoric that alienates the Muslim community for the actions of ISIS helps further the fabricated religious connection that fuels their perceived legitimacy. Moreover, denying refugee status for people trying to escape the Islamic State will also increase the sampling pool for ISIS recruiters. While the safety of Americans should be paramount to any commander in chief, the fact of the matter is that the current refugee vetting system is incredibly thorough. According to a report from the **CATO Institute**, “Of the 859,629 refugees who have entered the United States since 2001, three have been convicted for planning a terrorist attack abroad and exactly zero have perpetrated domestic attacks.”

Given these statistics and the humanitarian crisis in Syria, some would say that the United States has a moral obligation to take in more Syrian refugees. However, this cannot be done in a vacuum. Refugees in the United States often settle in lower socioeconomic areas. This puts them at continued risk of becoming the victims of crime and/or recruitment targets of organized crime groups. In order to responsibly accept refugees, America must continue vetting them thoroughly and provide adequate social and security support upon arrival and thereafter.

Ultimately, it is extremely difficult for a Syrian to become a refugee in the United States. According to the CATO Institute, there is a 0.042 percent chance of a Syrian refugee entering the United States after spending at least three years in a refugee camp. It is easier for ISIS to secure student visas, tourist visas and business visas, or to simply recruit lawful permanent residents or citizens in the United States. Although we may not know exactly who we are admitting in the short term, the risk is extremely low, and denying admission to refugees is much more dangerous — for them and us — in the long term.