

15 Years after 9-11: Has the Islamic Terror Threat Worsened?

by Jerry Gordon (September 2016)



On September 11, 2001, Islamic terrorists, 19 well educated young men – Saudi, Egyptian, and Yemeni nationals – hijacked four airliners (American Airlines Flight 11 and United Flight 175 from Boston’s Logan airport, American Airlines Flight 77 from Dulles airport and United Airlines Flight 93 from Newark Airport). They were part of a team of 26 Al Qaeda operatives inserted into the US. With captive passengers aboard, they flew into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in Manhattan and the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. Brave actions of the 40 passengers and crew aboard Flight 93 led to the first counter-attack within thirty minutes of the sky-jacking. The Flight 93 heroes overcame the Islamic terrorists diverting the aircraft from its ultimate target, either the White House or the Capital building in Washington, crashing into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, 50 miles from Pittsburgh.

Sunday September 11, 2016 will be the 15th commemoration of the Al Qaeda suicide sky-jackings at the fateful twin towers in Lower Manhattan, the Pentagon in Northern Virginia and the diverted crash in Pennsylvania that took the innocent lives of nearly 3,000 Americans and others. Many who survived could tell stories about the valiant heroes from the storied ranks of New York’s Finest and Bravest.

Among the valiant fallen was [Rick Riscorla](#), former Army officer, who survived the Battle of the Ia Drag valley in Viet Nam. He shepherded many hundreds of investment firm employees to safety on 9/11. He did not survive. There was the ironic case of John P. O’Neill, Former Deputy Director of the FBI, who had successfully [investigated](#) and brought to justice [Ramzi Ahmed Yousuf](#) and blind Sheik Abdul Rahman, the main perpetrators of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, a precursor to 9/11. He had warned about a possible 9/11-type attack.

However, his warnings were ignored. Ironically he was killed on 9/11, his first day on the job as the World Trade Center Security Director. O'Neil's quixotic counterterrorism effort and fate on 9/11 was memorialized in Lawrence Wright's 2006 best seller, [*The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*](#).

Memorials will be held in lower Manhattan at the [National 9/11 Museum](#) in the shadow of the Freedom Tower that replaced the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center (WTC). Others will occur at the [9/11 Pentagon Memorial](#) and the [Flight 93 9/11 Memorial](#) in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

Saturday, September 10th, a memorial was [held](#) in the southern tier New York State community of Owego to honor one of its own, who perished on an upper floor of the WTC towers. The memorial plaque in Owego cites Islamic terrorists as the perpetrators of this heinous crime on unsuspecting victims. It was objected to by Muslim advocates in the region. They wanted to expunge the reference to "Islamic terrorists" instead replacing it with either "terrorists" or "Al Qaeda terrorists." The request was denied by the Owego town manager on the grounds that altering the plaque would be acceding to politically correct objections that were both historically and factually inaccurate.

What a number of us called the Pearl Harbor of the 21st Century was perpetrated by Sunni extremist Jihadists, facilitated in part by the Shiite Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxy Hezbollah. The 2016 memorial comes at a time when there is rising concern over global Islamic terrorism. In America we have experienced attacks perpetrated by Jihadist US citizens and immigrants in several massacres in Boston, Chattanooga, San Bernardino and Orlando. The Orlando massacre was the most significant mass shooting in American history. Over \$1 trillion in taxpayer funding has been spent to create new homeland security and transportation safety agencies, and establish counterterrorism intelligence sharing among domestic and international groups. The FBI is tracking over 1000 cases of ISIS sympathizers.

A recent FoxNews *poll* [revealed](#) a heightened sense of unease among Americans who feel less secure after 9/11. Among the poll's findings were:

Some 54 percent think the United States is less safe now than before the September 11 attacks. Thirty-nine percent say the country is safer. Last year, it was 53-38 percent. Prior to September 2014, more voters than not said the country was safer

Most voters, 80 percent, think it's at least somewhat likely a major attack "causing large numbers of American lives to be lost" will happen in the near future.

What is concerning is that there has been a shift in the Islamic terror paradigm away from the costly, carefully planned, well executed and financed spectacular events like 9/11 to ones that are ideological driven by self-actualized fundamentalists. They are among thousands in a global network spawned by the Salafist Islamic State. They are attracted by the self-declared Caliphate's conquest of territory in Syria and Iraq and the ability to "freely" practice a pure form of totalitarian political Islam. All in a territory administered under strict Islamic Shariah law by "Caliph" Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi based on the example of the "Prophet" Mohammed. It is replete with rape, pillage, slavery and massacres of *kuffars*, unbelievers. These include Christians and other non-Muslim minorities including non-Sunni Muslims and even Sunni Muslims who dare to contest the Islamic State fundamentalism. They are deemed heterodox and subject to summary execution.

In this article we will explore what has given rise to this dangerous shift in Islamic terrorism and why it has arisen. Al Qaeda, still a threat, is consternating counterterrorism efforts both here and elsewhere in the West. We will also address possible bio-weapon and dirty bomb threats that have surfaced in discussions about ISIS. Then there is the matter of Iranian links to 9/11 compounded by the problematic nuclear deal, the JCPOA.

9/11- the Al Qaeda "Blessed" Event

As if on cue, Al Qaeda Central head, Aymen al-Zawihiri, who succeeded Osama bin Laden, [issued](#) a 20 minute video message on the 15th commemoration. He said:

We mark in these days the passage of nearly 15 years since the blessed invasions in Washington, New York and Pennsylvania.

According to a MEMRI translation, Al-Zawahiri:

focused on al-Qaeda's reasons behind the 9/11 attacks and its impact on the U.S. He urged his followers to focus on targeting the U.S. and its allies, while bringing the battle to their own soil. Zawahiri also appealed to non-Muslim African-Americans calling on them to convert to Islam.

Al-Zawahiri's whereabouts, while not verified, may be somewhere in Pakistan or possibly, in one of their North African affiliates. However, as events have worked out, Al Qaeda has been eclipsed by its affiliates that have operated independently – most dramatically by its offspring, the Islamic State, formerly Al Qaeda in Iraq.

The Rising Toll of Jihad in the US and Globally

With the constellation of Jihadi events in the run up to this 15th commemoration of 9/11, the cumulative number of [deaths](#) in US since 9/11 due to domestic Jihadists is 94. The [prosecution](#) of Jihadists since 9/11 has climbed to 364 versus 184 for so-called non-jihadist extremist cases. In 2015, the Heritage Foundation [reported](#) more than 70 terrorist plots have been foiled since 9/11. The rise of ISIS as a self-declared Caliphate in the conquered territory in Syria and Iraq motivated many of the recent murderous Jihad attacks in North America and in Europe, *The New York Times* [reported](#) that the casualty toll of ISIS in the West had climbed to over 1,200 victims. The attacks in Paris, Nice, Rouen and Brussels raised the specter of bombing and other attacks from ISIS super cells among large émigré Muslim communities. Add to that, the threat from returning foreign fighters, trained by the Islamic State and also infiltrating the massive stream of refugees and migrants fleeing conflict zones from Syria and across the Muslim Ummah in the Middle East, South Asia and Africa. The Europol chief Rob Wainwright [reported](#) that upwards of 5,000 returning ISIS fighters are at large in Europe.

The irony of the rise of the Islamic State is that it was spawned by Al Qaeda in Iraq and now surpasses the parent organization that launched its successful mass terror operation in the West on 9/11. Some analysts indicate the rise of the Islamic State has diminished the original trans-global jihadist creed of Al Qaeda Central as the former holds territory and practices a pure form of Islam under Shariah. That has been the major attraction for the thousands of foreign fighters from across the Ummah teeming to join it. The Nigerian terror group Boko Haram which has pledged fealty to the Islamic State as the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) is [rated](#) by the Global Terror Index (GTI) as the world's largest Islamic terror group surpassing the barbarous record of the Islamic State. Since 2009, Boko Haram has [murdered](#) over 15,000 since 2009, [7,619](#) in 2014 alone. Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan [accounted](#) for nearly four

fifths (78%) of the 32, 685 deaths attributed to terrorists in 2014. A majority of these deaths are afflicted on Muslims. The *takfiri* Islamic doctrine of Salafist terror groups like the Islamic State considers them inadvertent casualties in the necessary pursuit of Jihad. They are the equivalent of non-Muslims or *kuffars*, if they reject ISIS' fundamentalist doctrine.

Why the Islamic Terror Threat had Grown

Just before this 15th 9/11 commemoration, a symposium was [held](#) on the threat of Islamic terrorism at a conference of the Intelligence and National Security Alliance (INSA) and the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association (AFCEA) in Washington, DC. As [reported](#) by the *Washington Times*, current director of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), Nick Rasmussen noted:

The dramatic rise of Islamic State and its ability to expand around the world presents a danger that is "considerably less predictable" than those posed by [al Qaeda](#) at the height of their power, shortly after the 2001 attacks on the [Pentagon](#) and World Trade Center.

The diverse and decentralized nature of the Islamic State has allowed the group to carry out attacks "much more quickly and with much less warning" than previous terror groups.

Islamic State's dependence on so-called "lone-wolf" attackers, individuals either loosely affiliated or inspired by the group's virulent jihadi ideology, has particularly confounded the U.S. intelligence community.

The lack of linkages in contrast to those of sleeper cells of Al Qaeda central, especially by lone wolf attackers who were inspired by Islamic State's impressive online propaganda operation, has opened up "a size and scale of the [U.S.] population" susceptible to radicalization.

Former NCTC director Michael Leiter suggested, "This will be a challenge for the incoming Administration."

Further he noted:

The nature of the threat has become more complicated, the evolving methods used by Islamic State for its attacks on the U.S. and Europe are also

posing its own set of challenges.

Osama bin Laden and his [al Qaeda](#) successors tried unsuccessfully – so far – to replicate the spectacular high-profile attacks of 9/11. Those types of attacks took immense amounts of planning, communication, financing and coordination and came with a high risk of failure.

Islamic State has shifted that paradigm. The group pursued far more basic tactics, such as last year's mass shooting at an office party in San Bernardino, California, or the July attack in Nice, France, where an Islamic State operative used a truck to run down revelers at the seaside resort town.

Islamic State planners realized they did not need to hijack a plane or plant a truck bomb in Times Square to be effective. A heavy truck or easy access to semi-automatic weapons "is all you need" to carry out an attack.

The Shift in Fundamentalist Islamic Doctrine 'inspiring' US ISIS Jihadi Attackers

The Al Qaeda perpetrators came from Middle East countries heavily influenced by Muslim Brotherhood extremist doctrine such as that propounded by [Sayyid Qutb](#), the Egyptian theological ideologue, who provided intellectual groundings for the trans-global jihad movement. The perpetrators of terror attacks in Garland, Texas, San Bernardino and Orlando, Florida were émigrés or immigrants from South Asia, Pakistan and Afghanistan. They attended mosques espousing the anti-Western Deobandi and Tablighi Jamaat creeds. In our August 2016, *New English Review* [article](#) on DHS whistleblower Phillip Haney, he connected the TJ ideology of the perpetrators in both the San Bernardino and Orlando massacres.

The TJ movement sprang from the Deobandi-influenced clerics from India and Pakistan. Haney indicated that TJ Islamic doctrine is the equivalent of ISIS Salafism or Saudi Wahhabism. The TJ movement aimed at proselytizing other Sunni Muslims and gaining converts from other religions. It is estimated to have between 70 to over 120 million adherents globally. Their influence spawned the Taliban and radical terrorist groups like [Lashkar e Taiba](#), Army of the Righteous, whose adherents perpetrated the Mumbai jihad massacre of 2008. In the US, the TJ has a beehive Madrassa; the International Islamic Education School based in Chicago and affiliated with the Bridgewater Islamic Center. Haney

suggested that the designation of mosques as “centers” usually was a tip off that it was a TJ doctrine group.

When news broke of the Orlando massacre, Haney went through an intelligence exercise. He demonstrated the TJ network that encompassed the Fort Pierce Florida “center” attended by perpetrator Omar Mateen and his father’s membership on the board. The Fort Pierce *masjid* or mosque had connections to the IIE in Chicago. Which in turn, had connections to the San Bernardino Dar-al-Uloom al-Islamiya of America mosque where terrorist Syed Rizwan Farook worshipped. The imam, Roshan Zamir Abbassi, a Pakistani, [told](#) FBI investigators that he barely knew Rizwan and his wife Tashfeen Malik. Malik had been a convert to TJ Deobandism while attending the al Hulda women’s seminary in Pakistan. Haney further noted that the choice to return to the US and with his Pakistani bride via Chicago and given their appearance in Sharia compliant attire was purposeful. It was deemed a safer port of entry than Atlanta.

The Deadly Threats of Bio-Terrorism and Dirty Bombs

Dr. Jill Bellamy, noted bio-defense expert and member of the UN Counterterrorism Task Force, warned that ISIS may be in possession of laboratories, staffed by scientists and backed by the caches of Saddam Hussein’s CBW weapons stockpiles. All funded by \$2 billion in revenues from oil smuggling profits, taxes on conquered populations and illegal antiquities sales. There has been evidence that ISIS may have used chemical weapons against Kurdish forces in Syria and Iraq, as well as on civilians. Because an ISIS super cell planned to attack Belgian nuclear research facilities, she also drew attention to the possibility of terrorists obtaining radioactive materials for the creation of dirty bombs. There have been several arrests made in Moldova of nuclear materials smuggling rings that were alleged to be fulfilling orders for Middle East sources. The bio-weapon threat loomed in the wake of 9/11 when several were killed in anthrax attacks via mail and a US Senate Office Building and several US Postal Service facilities were shut and decontaminated costing several hundred million dollars.

Former National Security Administration (NSA) and ex-CIA director General Michael Hayden [revealed](#) in a *Daily Beast* interview, that many in his agency were concerned after 9/11 about “chatter” from Al Qaeda suggesting a possible nuclear attack in the metro Washington area. They also thought the NSA headquarters

complex located at Fort Meade midway between Baltimore and Washington might be a vulnerable target for a possible Al Qaeda nuclear attack. In October 2001, Hayden had gone to the extent of contacting his opposite official at the UK NSA equivalent, GCHQ, regarding setting up transfer of global electronic intelligence surveillance as a contingency.

The bio-weapon attack and dirty bomb terrorist threats were the only plausible threats post- 9/11 raised by Steven Brill in an *Atlantic* article, "[Is America Any Safer?](#)"

Brill wrote about an inadequate bio-defense capability:

An [independent blue ribbon] panel offered a stinging indictment of America's bio -terrorism security apparatus based on some simulations of terrorist attacks:

The report was written by an all-star bipartisan panel organized by Lewis "Scooter" Libby, who now works at the Hudson Institute, a conservative think tank. As Vice President Dick Cheney's national-security adviser, Libby led the country's bioterrorism-defense initiatives following 9/11 and the anthrax attacks.

What a difference 15 years makes. The bioterrorism threat hasn't receded; if anything, as the panel pointed out, advances in science and technology have made it easier to launch these kinds of weapons. But the nation's attention has receded—which is emblematic of the roller-coaster way our democracy and its leaders deal with risks. As suggested by the report's rhetoric about "failures of imagination," our imagination is limited to the day's headlines. Policy makers fight the war that made those headlines, not the war that might come next.

On the matter of the dirty bomb threat, Brill addressed the dysfunctional regulations by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission of radioactive materials widely used in hospitals and in industrial applications, most prominently in the nation's oil and pipeline industries. Note this comment from one critic of the current regulatory model and the attitude of the head of the Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards office:

It's just a matter of time until someone puts two and two together and

sees that you don't have to go to Syria or Iran for this material, that you can get it in New York.

[Watch](#) this PBS News Hour Interview with Steven Brill on these threats.

Someone whom Brill respects, former NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly, was [interviewed](#) on Yahoo News about the dirty bomb terrorist threat. He believes it is the "greatest threat" in the hands of a terrorist group. He considers it plausible and dangerous, not because of its immediate lethality, rather, he points out that a dirty bomb is an area denial weapon that could bring a bustling business center like Manhattan to a complete stop and make it a virtual deserted town while reclamation takes decades. Moreover it is cheap to make, something that ISIS knows and has worked on. It has, as Kelly points out, a devastating economic terror impact. [Watch](#) this Yahoo News video interview with former NYPD Commissioner Kelly.

The Iran Links to 9/11

Earlier, we made reference to Iran's links to 9/11. In December 2011, New York Federal District Court judge George Daniel handed down a ruling awarding claims to survivors of victims of 9/11. In March, 2016, Daniels [entered](#) a default judgment against Iran on behalf of these plaintiffs in the amount of \$10.5 billion. It was the subject of a recent *Wall Street Journal* op-ed piece by former US Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee Chairman, Senator Joe Lieberman, "[Remember Iran's Role in 9/11.](#)" This *Wall Street Journal* commentary by former Senator Lieberman corroborates Iran's complicity in a Washington, DC federal court trial concerning survivors of victims in the 1998 bombings of the US Embassies in East Africa. Iran and its proxy Hezbollah were actively engaged in the training, transportation and harboring of the 9/11 Al Qaeda operatives and the bin Laden family in Iran prior to and following 9/11. That was part of the evidentiary record of the Iran 9/11 links case, [Havlish et al versus Osama bin Laden, Iran, et al.](#) heard before the NY federal district court in Manhattan with findings of Iranian complicity in the 9/11 attack and awards handed down in 2011. Fiona Havlish, the lead plaintiff in the matter, was the wife of one of the 9/11 victims.

[Affidavits](#) were presented by experts like Ken Timmerman and others, including Iranian intelligence defectors presented during the trial. One of those involved

in the training of the Al Qaeda “musclemen” engaged in overpowering crews on board the ill fated sky-jacked flights was Hezbollah terrorist mastermind, Imad Mughniyah. He was involved with the 1983 Marine Corps Beirut barracks attack, the 1992 Israeli Embassy and 1994 AMIA Jewish Center bombings in Buenos Aires, and the 1996 Khobar Towers Bombing to name a few of his murderous exploits. Prior to 9/11, Mughniyah was the terrorist mastermind at the top of the FBI’s most wanted list. He was taken out in a 2008 bombing of his Mitsubishi Pajero SUV after he left the Iranian Embassy in Damascus, where he was celebrating the 1979 Islamic Revolution in February 2008, allegedly by Israel’s Mossad.

Extremist Muslim Shiite Iran has worked hand in glove with extremist Sunni Muslim Al Qaeda terrorists when they had a common enemy in their gun sights: the US, aka the “great Satan” and “little Satan,” Israel. As former Senator Lieberman pointed out, Iran is using funds released under the JCPOA nuclear deal to support terrorism in Syria and Iraq, wherever the Islamic regime in Tehran needs to threaten the US or Israel.

Conclusion

This 9/11 we must recall those who have lost their lives in the attack by Al Qaeda Islamic terrorists 15 years ago. We are now confronting a vastly more complicated threat than the well planned, coordinated and financed attack that took the lives of 3,000 innocent victims. It may be a terror war of a thousand cuts by ISIS sympathizers, not currently on counterterrorism watch lists. Moreover, these ISIS network sympathizers need only have access to readily available weapons, or crudely made dirty bombs to produce mass casualties. We expect that whatever Administration succeeds the current one after November’s election, it will need to undertake a thorough review of these threats and the means of preventing terror plots against us.

Also see Jerry Gordon’s collection of interviews, [here](#).

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