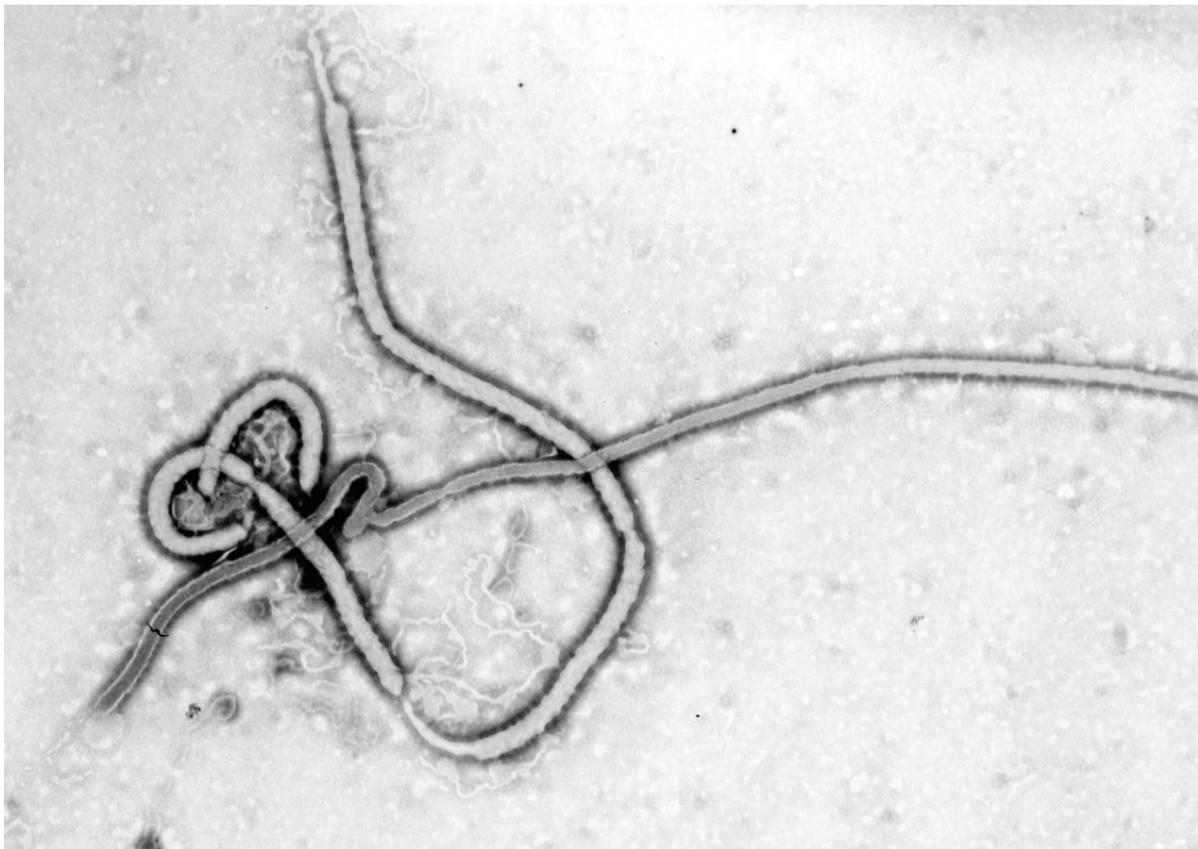


Health Security Challenges and Responses: From Ebola to Terrorism



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Health Security Challenges and Responses:
From Ebola to Terrorism

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Professor Lawrence R. Velte

I appreciate the opportunity to be here. I have been asked to speak about terrorist and insurgent groups that are operating not just in Africa but also in other parts of the region, and a bit about how they affect the potential for humanitarian disasters in the region. There has been plenty of literature analyzing these groups, some of the best has been done here at the Potomac Institute, so I am not going to go into what Al-Qa'ida is all about or what ISIS is all about. But what I want to do is talk about the activities of these groups and the potential for the development of true humanitarian crises in the region, and that is primarily through the issue of refugees and displaced persons.

I have some statistics that I will relate, the sources of which are primarily the United Nations, either the High Commissioner for Refugees or the Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs. In Africa, the activities of Boko Haram, a group that has certainly made headlines recently, have driven approximately 10,000 Nigerian refugees to Cameroon. There are probably 50,000 Nigerians in Niger, and there are several hundred thousand internally displaced persons in Nigeria; maybe even up to a million, because these numbers keep changing as the situation evolves.

Moving a little bit further north, in the Mali situation, and the activities of Al-Qa'ida and the Islamic Maghreb further to the north in Mali and Algeria. There are 300,000 internally displaced people within Mali. I mentioned 50,000 in Niger, actually some of those come from Mali. And in both of those areas, the UN is monitoring, not for Ebola necessarily, but for yellow fever, cholera, and this sort of thing. I do want to emphasize that the potential humanitarian disasters are certainly more than just medically related disasters.

Libya is perhaps the genesis of this whole process, especially in northern Africa. There are sixty thousand internally displaced persons within Libya, a country where the authority of any sort of government, be it the central government or regional governments, does not extend very far beyond the building in which they are meeting. There are also a million Libyan refugees in Tunisia, according to the UN. The president of Tunisia, President Marzouki, who will be president until the elections in late November, says that it is actually up to two million Libyans in Tunisia, which is one third of the pre-2011 population. Now Tunisia has strong medical capabilities, but this situation really taxes the capacity of countries to handle these people.

Now, let us talk about ISIS and the associated refugee situation, which dwarfs these other numbers, and then I will talk a little about ISIS itself at the end of my remarks. The UN says there are 3.2 million registered refugees-- registered with the UN --from ISIS, the Syrian civil war, and sectarian fighting within Iraq. There are more than a million refugees each in Jordan from both Iraq and Syria. And Jordan has received successive waves of refugees from 1948 right up until this year. About 1.3 million are in Turkey--these are registered—and 1.2 million in Lebanon. Five hundred thousand Syrian refugees are in Iraq-- they went from the frying pan to the fire if you will, or the other way around depending on your perspective, and they sought refuge in Iraq. And there are nine hundred thousand internally displaced people within Iraq. In Syria, the number suggests there are about four million Syrians that have been displaced. Now some of them go to the cities or live with relatives; not necessarily all are in displaced person

camps. But as winter gets close, about 5.2 million people in Iraq, says the United Nations, are in need or will be in need of humanitarian assistance: fuel, shelter, that sort of thing.

And here is a chilling statistic: there are now about ten million people living in areas that are controlled by ISIS in Syria and Iraq. That is larger than the population of most of the states in the region. Now, this of course creates large refugee populations, camps, emergency needs, and there are, as we heard from our previous speakers, many obstacles to both governments and international organizations providing the necessary humanitarian assistance. These obstacles can seem absurd, such as in Pakistan, where “Polio vaccination teams are actually there to sterilize your daughters, so do not let them into the village.” And in fact several have been killed. Or, “Medical workers are actually bringing Ebola into your part of the country so stay away from those people.” It is misinformation and extremist propaganda that we have to counteract.

Other obstacles are far more challenging. There are terror attacks or insurgent attacks going on in all these countries I mentioned that threaten NGOs, and not just the foreigners but also the indigenous or native NGOs. In Niger the government has said that any NGOs or humanitarian teams providing any kind of assistance need armed escorts anywhere outside of the capital. That certainly inhibits people flocking to help the victims there. There are kidnappings and abductions of humanitarian aid workers in Mali. ISIS has targeted humanitarian aid workers also and we have seen the beheading of two Britons who were there for humanitarian purposes. Concerning Syria, the UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs declared, “We have had sixty six humanitarian workers who have lost their lives since the start of that conflict, and hundreds more have been kidnapped or abducted.” This is certainly an obstacle to mobilizing the assistance necessary to take care of these people. And as we have seen in refugee camps in Jordan and probably elsewhere, the war or sectarian fighting in Syria and Iraq can spread to the camps themselves. In other words fighters from both sides of the conflict can infiltrate the camps as refugees and carry on the fight within the camps. This really stresses the host nation security services as they try to police these camps, the UN as they try to run the camps, and other international organizations as they try to provide humanitarian aid. So we have this situation in these camps with millions of people facing not only a potential medical crisis, but other humanitarian crises in terms of food, water, and shelter.

Now let me talk a little more about ISIS because this represents a new situation. We call it ISIS, or at least that is what the U.S. Government insists on calling it, and take note I am no longer part of the government and am speaking just for myself. So our government insists on calling it ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, but ISIS has its eyes on a lot more than just Iraq and Syria. If you look at their map of the world caliphate, it resembles no caliphate that ever existed in the history of Islam. Most of northern Africa into sub-Saharan Africa, all of Spain, and much of South Asia are included. Whether or not they have the capacity to execute their project, they have this vision of a world-wide caliphate.

This is the first terrorist organization that has been able to control territory in the daytime as well as the night. And this is key territory: cities, infrastructure, roadways, rivers, that sort of thing. As I said, ten million people live in the area they control. We can say AQIM and similar groups in Africa can roam the desert and strike at will, but ISIS controls territory. They have displaced the government in the places they control, both national governments, such as they

existed, and the more traditional tribal authorities. But they have not filled the governance vacuum that they themselves created or that had been growing before they came upon the scene. They are not providing services to these ten million people that live in their area. They do not even seem to care about providing services to these people. I do not regularly surf the jihadi websites, but I have not seen anything from ISIS that seeks to show how, for example, they have made life better for the people of Mosul now that Maliki and his corrupt regime is gone. All their propaganda is centered on conflict, retribution, beheadings and that sort of thing. This is a totalitarian organization in the classic sense of the word: if you are not one of us we will kill you; even if you are one of us and you do not toe the line and believe what we do and do and say, we will kill you.

So this is a different, a very different organization to Al-Qa'ida. Al-Qa'ida never really took that line. And now we are seeing ISIS clone-type organizations in northern Africa that are swearing allegiance to ISIS, like they did before to Al-Qa'ida central. The Jund al-Khalifa in Mali and Northern Africa and elements of Boko Haram are doing it. So we are getting these almost nihilistic totalitarian terrorist organizations that are in effective control of a lot of territory. Very little is getting into these places that ISIS does not authorize. The International Committee of the Red Cross says that it did manage to provide some medical equipment to a hospital in ISIS-controlled Mosul, and the ICRC said it has established contacts with some people inside Fallujah, Iraq--not much success in this huge problem. So that is the situation as I see it. We are facing a very difficult situation in these regions, and we—the international community-- are under-resourced to respond effectively.

Professor Don Wallace, Jr.

Many of you come to these programs of Yonah's, and there is always one golden thread that runs through them, and I think it is the sheer gold or richness of what is said. I sometimes find it a little bit difficult to pull it all together in my head. I think today we have a fairly common set of themes. I thought initially we would be talking about fear, but I think we are really talking about underlying reality.

Let me talk about ISIS briefly. We have had a program on ISIS before, I think it was called ISIL at the time, and I think Yonah or someone called it terrorism, but I think it is probably deeper than terrorism. Terrorism is certainly one of the things it has spawned; I think this is something we really have to be concerned about. I think we have seen the collapse, probably, of the Middle East order. I think someone mentioned that yesterday was the 91st anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic, which was roughly the same time as the end of the Caliphate. I wonder when people will turn against the Turks for having ended the Caliphate. I think there is a real unraveling there; the problems are profound. I think, with so many of these problems fear comes from ignorance. But even if you are knowledgeable and not afraid, I think it is very hard to get a total grip on the underlying reality as it is evolving, and I think this is something we will come back to again and again. Yonah has been drawing the arc of terrorism, its map is on the screen behind us, and the arc keeps on growing and deepening.

On the other side, I thought it was rather interesting, I did not see how we would link Ebola to this, but now I see. It is really our inadequacy of our ability to cope. Yes, difficulty in coping with ISIS, but maybe even a greater difficulty coping with Ebola and then possibly bio-terror.

And I think there you get to something very deep in America which is our priorities. I am a Republican, but I am certainly not a Tea-Party Republican. Now, the disinclination of Americans to spend money on public goods; the belief that private life is what it is all about, the atriums in buildings, the beautiful houses, the meals. We think there is something wrong with our manhood in wanting to spend money on public goods. Yet, as Dr. Kadlec has pointed out, we fail to do that at our peril.

It is not the same as what Yonah said before; Yonah said before that as we cope with security problems, we must not neglect our civil liberties, and I agree completely; I am a lawyer and lawyers tend to be interested in that and concerned with it. And they are not the same. But nonetheless, our regard for our liberties is somewhat related to our regard for our untrammelled freedoms: our unwillingness to sacrifice in the short and long term. And I do not know if we will get serious about it or not, even in the face of emergencies, crises. We are not marines. General Gray is a marine, the military has a discipline, and the civilian publics of the west do not have it. So I think we are going to lurch and lurch, and incrementally – your word General – do a little better. But we are going to have to cope with our problems, and I hope we do not succumb to fear in the process. Thank you.

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