

Opinion

Editorial

The threat of lone wolves

So-called lone wolves, solitary extremists inspired by jihadist propaganda, have struck in recent days in the United States and France.

At least 49 people were killed and 53 injured after a lone American gunman of Afghan descent attacked a nightclub in Orlando, Florida, on June 11th. Omar Mateen, 29, claimed he was acting on behalf of the Islamic State (ISIS).

Three days later, Larossi Abballa, a 25-year-old Frenchman of North African descent, bludgeoned to death a police commander and his companion in their home near Paris.

The two incidents reveal the multiple challenges posed by lone wolf attacks.

Such attacks remain very difficult to detect even though it was expected that jihadist groups would use the holy Muslim month of Ramadan to incite against Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

On May 21st, right before Ramadan, ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani exhorted sympathisers to make the holy period “a month of hurt on the infidels everywhere”.

Self-radicalisation has been facilitated by global access to the internet.

There is evidence Mateen was attracted to the online speeches of al-Qaeda preacher Anwar al-Awlaqi, as was US Army Major Nidal Hasan, a lone shooter who killed 13 people in a Fort Hood, Texas, shooting in 2009.

There are however new challenges. The faster pace of self-radicalisation, referred to as “flash-radicalisation”, makes acts of terror even harder to predict. There is a shocking new twist in the abuse of social media by jihadists: Abballa posted video of his murderous act on Facebook Live.

Major technology companies such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube should develop a technological antidote to live broadcasts by terrorists.

The media, too, are struggling with how to do their legitimate work without providing publicity and encouragement to copy-cat terrorists. CNN’s Anderson Cooper took the initiative by refusing to mention the name of the Orlando shooter or show his picture to deny him the post-mortem fame many lone wolves seek. However, there has been no consensus in the international media community in favour of Cooper’s move.

Politicians should not allow the acts of isolated lone wolves to stigmatise all nationals or recent migrants of Muslim faith and Arab extraction, the way presidential contender Donald Trump has used the Orlando incident to inspire fear and suspicion against Muslims, recent immigrants as well as those born in the United States. He did the same thing after the San Bernardino, California, attack last December.

US President Barack Obama urged Americans to resist the temptation of prejudice: “Where does this stop? The Orlando killer, one of the San Bernardino killers, the Fort Hood killer – they were all US citizens. Are we going to start treating all Muslim Americans differently? Are we going to start subjecting them to special surveillance?” he asked.

The United States is a particularly valued target for ISIS-inspired lone wolves and the country’s permissive gun laws make it easier for deranged minds of all kinds to obtain powerful weapons.

It is impossible to stop a lone disturbed individual from committing a terrible crime but countering the ISIS narrative and impeding access to weapons of mass death are two steps that clearly need to be taken. And politicians such as Trump should stop rewarding the wolves for their deeds.

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Why Britons should vote to remain in the EU



Mahmud el-Shafey

British voters head to the polls June 23rd for an election to decide the country’s political future in, or perhaps out of, the European Union. Newspapers and late-night television talk shows are filled with debate about the issues dominating the referendum from workers’ rights to the economy, from security to the environment and, of course, immigration.

According to the Office for National Statistics net migration to Britain rose to 330,000 in 2015, the second highest figure on record. British Prime Minister David Cameron has come under considerable flak, even from within his own party, for his inability to control immigration, with senior Conservative Party figures pledging support for the Leave campaign.

The government is officially backing the Remain campaign, as is the main opposition Labour Party, but many British voters remain unconvinced. It is this reactionary fear of immigration and the effects that this has on the National Health Service (NHS), job opportunities and the housing sector that appear to be gaining purchase.

But British voters must dare to ignore the short-term considerations and the scaremongering tactics of the Leave campaign to vote in favour of remaining in the European Union. The benefits of immigration far outweigh potential disadvantages.

Politically, the United Kingdom is stronger as part of the European Union and must confront future crises – whether international terrorism or climate change or, yes, even immigration – as part of an EU-wide response.

As for the economy, immigration increased total employment and tax revenues in Britain during a very difficult

post-recession period, softening what could have been a much more severe austerity.

Away from clear political and economic benefits of remaining in the union, a vote to leave is a vote for social division and

marginalisation. Immigration, whether from within the European Union or beyond, has

had a positive effect on all aspects of British society. Immigrants and their children have had an indelible effect on Britain. They are seen on television screens and their works are on bookshelves. They are serving in the armed forces and lining up in England’s national football team. They form the backbone of the NHS.

A vote to leave the European Union based on the idea that immigration is “dangerous” would be to repudiate every positive effect immigration has had on the United Kingdom. This would popularise the divisive discourse that Donald Trump is seeking to promote in the United States and make “immigrants” an easy scapegoat for all problems. A post-EU Britain would be a cold and unforgiving place.

“It is all very well to blame “faceless” migrants for all the ills of society, but what would British society look like without them?”

As for the idea that Britain is “full”, this is simply not true. As of 2012, approximately 10% of the United Kingdom was classified as urban (a definition that includes roads and rural development, as well as towns and cities). There is plenty of room to build on, even within existing towns and cities where just more than half of land is made up of green spaces. Fears about the effects that unfettered immigration is having on public services are similarly exaggerated, particularly as this comes at a time of major government cuts.

The United Kingdom, like many other EU countries, has an ageing population. In 2007, the number of people in Britain older than 65 outnumbered the number of people younger than 16 for the first time. Migrants, usually young and educated, pay for themselves. They come to Britain to work, to build a life, contributing to the economy and society in general.

It is all very well to blame “faceless” migrants for all the ills of society, from crime to poverty to unemployment, but what would British society look like without them?

“British voters must dare to ignore the short-term considerations and the scaremongering tactics of the Leave campaign.”