HOW TO PROTECT AGAINST TERRORISM: ELIMINATE THE VALUABLE TERRORIST TECHNOLOGY, THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

In addition to catching the third Brussels airport bomber, ~~Najim Laachraoui, a known Salah Abdelslam associate,~~ authorities in Europe have also revealed that the other two airport bombers were brothers, Khalid and Ibrahim El Bakraoui.

> Police sources earlier told NBC News that Khalid El Bakraoui, 27, and 30-year-old sibling Ibrahim blew themselves up. Both had been convicted of violent crimes in the past and had links to one of the Paris attackers.

The El Bakraouis join an increasingly long list of recent terrorists who partner within their nuclear family (the Boston Marathon attack, Charlie Hebdo attack, and Paris attack were all carried out by brothers, and the San Bernardino attack was carried out by spouses). As New America noted in November (that is before several more family launched attacks), 30% of the fighters they've identified had family ties to jihad.

> One-third of Western fighters have a familial connection to jihad, whether through relatives currently fighting in Syria or Iraq, marriage, or some other link to jihadists from prior conflicts or attacks. Of those with a familial link, almost two-thirds have a relative fighting in this conflict and almost one-third are connected through

> marriage, many of them new marriages
> conducted after arriving in Syria.

There has been less attention (though there has been some) about the operational advantages organizing attacks among family members offers. Not only would there be far more face-to-face conversations in any case (which you'd need a physical bug to collect), but even electronic communications metadata might not attract any attention, except insofar as helping to geolocate the parties. It'd be hard to distinguish, from metadata, between brothers or spouses discussing taking care of their kids from the same family members plotting to blow something up.

Family ties then, along with a reportedly difficult Moroccan dialect, may function to provide as much security as any (limited, given the reports) use of encryption. And all that's on top of the cell's extensive use of burner phones.

Using Jim Comey, um, logic, we might consider eliminating this threat by eliminating the nuclear family. Sure, the overwhelming majority of people who use it are law-abiding people obtaining valuable benefit from nuclear family. Sure, for the most vulnerable, family ties provide the most valuable kind of support to keep someone healthy. But bad guys exploit it too, and we can't have that.

I mean, perhaps there should be an honest public discussion about the proportional value the nuclear family gives to terrorists and to others. But why would we have that discussion for the nuclear family and not for encryption?

Update: as soon as I posted this I saw notice that Belgian press (and with them NBC, apparently) got the identity of the third hijacker wrong, so I've crossed out and/or taken out those references.