

If we want to protect the world from jihadist terrorism, we need to understand who and what we are fighting.
Peter Byrne reports from Mosul, Iraq

ROOTS OF TERROR

VERA MIRONOVA rides Humvee shotgun through Mosul's shattered cityscape. It is late January 2017. Iraqi prime minister Haider al-Abadi has just declared east Mosul liberated from three years of rule by Islamic State, or ISIS. Most jihadist fighters are dead or captured, or have crossed the Tigris to the west, digging in for a final stand. Left behind, biding their time, are snipers and suicide bombers.

Much of the population has fled to refugee camps on the outskirts. Those who stayed look lost and dazed. Men pull corpses out of houses destroyed by air strikes. Others cobble together street-corner markets, selling meat and vegetables imported from Erbil, 80 kilometres and another world away.

Few women are visible. Mironova stands out, dressed in combat trousers and a Harvard sweatshirt, wisps of blonde hair escaping her blue stocking hat. Despite travelling in an armoured car, she's clearly not a combatant. She's a social scientist, and her job is not to fight, but to listen, learn and record.

We stop for breakfast at My Fair Lady, a ramshackle restaurant that was a favoured eatery of ISIS fighters. The Iraqi special forces soldiers accompanying us say it has the best

pacha in town – steaming bowls of sheep brains and intestines stuffed with rice, with slices of black, fatty tongue and boiled oranges. Mironova orders a pizza.

A week later, a suicide bomber detonates himself at the entrance to the packed restaurant, killing the owner and several customers.

“The United States does not have a real counter-terrorism strategy,” says Martha Crenshaw. Faced with continued waves of jihadist terror attacks, in the conflict zones of Syria and Iraq but also closer to home, the West seems at a loss to know what to do. Crenshaw is something like the doyenne of terrorism studies, with a half-century career studying the roots of terror behind her. She occupies an office at Stanford University just down the hall from Condoleezza Rice, the former US national security advisor who was an architect of the “global war on terror” declared after the attacks of 11 September 2001. “There is a vast amount of money being thrown into the counter-terrorism system and nobody is in charge,” Crenshaw says. “We do not even know what success might look like. We are playing a dangerous game of whack-a-mole: terrorists pop up. We try to beat them down, hoping they will give up.”

In July, al-Abadi was back in Mosul, this time to declare the final liberation of Iraq's second city. Near-saturation bombardment of the centre by the US Air Force and a casualty-heavy, house-by-house offensive led by Iraqi forces had eliminated most of the fighters holding the city where the leader of ISIS, Abū Bakr al-Baghdadi, had proclaimed its



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