**University of Virginia Center for Politics**



**Talking Turkey: Homeland Security and Terrorism**

**Introductory Note:** Terrorist acts are regrettable instances of violence. Though it is difficult, and sad, to talk about terrorism, nevertheless it is an important topic of discussion. Keeping in mind the maturity level of your students/children, present the following information according to their degree of readiness. Consider that students’ parents may have varying comfort levels for mention of sensitive topics in the classroom. Remember that children are observant, and often absorb more knowledge from their surroundings than we expect. Very possibly, children will have already heard snippets of information about recent acts of terrorism.

**General Facts**

* More than fifteen years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City, terrorism continues to be one of the most salient threats to United States Homeland Security.
* Rather than fear of terrorism by foreign nationals on U.S. soil, modern concerns center on the phenomenon of “homegrown” or “domestic” terrorism, wherein American citizens or long-time residents conduct acts of terrorism.
	+ These individuals represent serious security concerns because they often have no outward connection to terrorist groups, and their attacks are generally unexpected by the intelligence community.
	+ It is said that most of these individuals undergo what is called “self-radicalization”, exposure to anti-American information published online by overseas terrorist organizations, rather than being radicalized by other, more traditional means, like during travel to areas with active terrorist cells.
	+ For more information on Domestic Terrorism, see: <http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/12/opinions/orlando-homegrown-terror-bergen/>
* One important aspect of the Global War on Terror, which began after 9/11, is the Patriot Act, passed in 2001. The Patriot Act made several important changes to existing privacy and communication laws, including increased wiretapping provisions, relaxed restrictions for surveillance, expansion of search warrants, and greater spending on electronic surveillance by the government.
	+ Supporters of the Patriot Act consider it a necessary provision for keeping America and its citizens safe. They feel that the increased measures of surveillance have enhanced information sharing within the intelligence community and the government, allowing them to act more quickly and effectively in stopping potential acts of terrorism. They also believe that these provisions help cut off the communication networks that make planning terrorist acts possible.
	+ Opponents of the Patriot Act believe that the provisions allow the government to violate their privacy and civil liberties. Americans not only cherish their civil liberties but believe in them as guiding principles for all human interaction. They do not surrender them lightly and any compromises in them will be tolerated only to the extent absolutely necessary and for a finite period of time. Some Americans feel that the Patriot Act takes away their right to privacy or that the positives of the Patriot Act do not outweigh the negatives of losing some civil liberties.
* During President Obama’s administration, some steps were made in responding to terrorism, such as the assassination of Osama Bin Laden. More recently, U.S. involvement in the Middle East remains a challenge, which will have to be addressed by newly inaugurated President Donald J. Trump.
* (For Older Kids) Terrorist organizations exist worldwide; however, terrorist cells such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS/ISIL that originated in the Middle East have demonstrated themselves as global threats. This, in return, has resulted in an international response through the United Nations and independent countries to condemn and counter these terrorist organizations.
* <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/17/world/mapping-isis-attacks-around-the-world/>
* <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12132.doc.htm>
* <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/terry-newell/the-american-response-to_b_8598350.html>

**Links for Additional Information/Sources of Information**

* In Depth
	+ “Homeland Security and Civil Liberties” :

<http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub697.pdf>

* + “Summary and Analysis of Key Section of the Patriot Act”: <http://www.cdt.org/security/011031summary.shtml>
	+ FBI Interactive Terrorism Threat Map: <https://homeland.house.gov/map/>
* Party and Presidential Positions:
	+ President Donald J. Trump: <http://www.ontheissues.org/2016/Donald_Trump_Homeland_Security.htm>
	+ Democratic Party: <https://www.democrats.org/issues/national-security>
	+ Republican Party: <https://gop.com/issue/national-defense/canonical/>

**Talking Points with Your Child**

* What is the balance between civil liberties and safety? Should one become more important than the other in certain situations, or should they always be given equal attention?
* Do you think that the government should be allowed to listen to your phone conversations? Why or why not?
* Do you think they should be allowed to all the time, none of the time, or only under certain circumstances?
* How do you think the Patriot Act helps the government catch terrorists?
* How do you think the government should respond to cases of domestic terrorism?
* Do you have any ideas for policies to keep Americans safe?