

## Becoming Aware

When examining data, it is common to make assumptions based upon prior knowledge, past experiences, or stereotypes. The memorandum “Concerns Relating to Foreign National at Port Fourchon” casts suspicion on Syrian refugee, Hayyan al Baghdadi, for committing a terrorist attack on an oil pipeline in Louisiana. Andrew McCabe, like many Americans, comes to this conclusion largely because Baghdadi is Islamic. American society generally perceives Muslims to be radical, especially after the 9/11 attacks and the media’s tendency to stereotype Muslims as extremists. The number of terrorist attacks, post 9/11, attributed to Islamic groups, also contributes to this conclusion. It is easy to interpret this document because it is human nature to rely on the stereotypes created by the media rather than think critically in order to analyze situations. Stereotypes lead one to believe that a Syrian refugee with access to the pipeline is to blame for the crime, simply due to his race. It is easy for one to assume that Baghdadi wanted to sabotage the oil pipeline in order to damage the American oil industry and create a larger demand for Syrian oil.

“A Syrian Refugee Story” by Alex Ackerman complicates the simplistic conclusion that Baghdadi is a radical terrorist by humanizing him and allowing the reader to sympathize with his plight. This article states that Baghdadi risked his life daily to provide for his family in Syria. The conditions were so harsh that he was nearly killed by a Syrian soldier, who assumed he was a terrorist. All of this inspired him to move to America for a better life. The article goes on to describe how he grew to love his life in America, mainly because “the U.S. offered the chance for personal growth and prosperity for his children” (Ackerman). Baghdadi has also gone on record saying that he condemns the actions of ISIS. The lack of love for his homeland, his emigration to a country that has helped him prosper, and his condemnation of ISIS and Islamic terrorists all suggest that he has no known motive or desire to participate in a terrorist attack. While many, including MacCabe, might associate Baghdadi with the oil pipeline explosion, this article makes it obvious that Baghdadi did not commit an act of terror simply because of his religion.

It is human nature to accept things at face value, but without all the information, initial interpretations are often false. After reading the first article, one would perceive that Baghdadi is Muslim and possibly a terrorist. From the second article, it is clear that he lacks obvious motivation to commit an act of terror. Learning about Baghdadi’s personal life leads one to an alternative conclusion. This conclusion is more challenging because it forces the reader to overcome personal and societal biases before finally realizing that he is a real human being. The idea that he is a terrorist is easier to perceive because it comes solely from his religion and the common image of Muslims. This is a prime example of the ideas expressed in David Foster Wallace’s video, “This is Water.” In his speech, Wallace encourages one to become aware of their surroundings. People should be fully conscious of their surroundings in order to properly perceive information and interpret reality accurately.