When President Barack Obama visits Lima this week for a two-day Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, the fight against Islamist terrorism should be at the very top of his agenda. In the last year, ISIS affiliates have appeared in Mexico, Argentina, Paraguay, Colombia, the Caribbean, and Brazil, to name a few. A terrorist plot by ISIS affiliate *Ansar al-Khilafah* targeting the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro was fortunately foiled. The counterterrorism success in Brazil was a combined effort by local and international authorities who acted quickly to thwart 12 Brazilian jihadists planning to emulate the November 2015 Paris attacks by ISIS. The catalyst enabling the Brazilian Federal Police to uncover this plot was the country's first antiterrorism legislation enacted this past March. This new law gave Brazilian officials the legal authority to case, survey, arrest, and convict Islamist terrorists before they act.

The key to convicting Islamic terrorists in Latin America is to criminalize their membership in foreign terrorist organizations. Unfortunately, Latin American countries lack the proper designation lists to add Islamic terrorist individuals and organizations, limiting their ability to prevent terrorist actions. More than half lack any form of antiterrorism legislation. In many countries being a member of ISIS or Hezbollah is not a criminal act in and of itself. Left unaddressed, this leaves Latin America with the same legal vacuum that existed in the United States twenty years ago. Prior to 1996, the U.S. lacked a proper legal framework to address the rise of terrorism, both foreign and domestic. After the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombings, Congress passed the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act. One of the most important provisions of this law allows the U.S. government to designate foreign terrorist organizations and prohibit their funding. In practice, this led to what is known as the Foreign Terrorist Organization list managed by the State Department. The list, which is updated every two years, allows U.S. authorities to more easily track and prosecute members of jihadist organizations, helping to preempt future terrorist attacks. Sen. Joni Ernst, an Iowa Republican, recently wrote a letter to President Obama urging his administration to be more proactive in working with Latin American officials to curb the expansion of Islamic extremists into "our own hemisphere." A good way to start would be for President Obama to highlight the importance of Peru's case against Mohamad Ghaleb Hamdar during his visit. Hamdar, an alleged Hezbollah operative, was arrested in October 2014with hundreds of pictures of high-value targets and critical infrastructure in Peru, as well as residue and traces of explosives on his person and apartment. The Hamdar case was prominently mentioned in the U.S. State Department's 2015 Country Reports on Terrorism. Moreover, the U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets and Control (OFAC) recently added Hamdar to a Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List effectively labeling him a terrorist and restricting his access to U.S. funds and American

companies. Hamdar's wife, Carmen Carrion Vela, a U.S.-Peruvian dual citizen, has also been arrested in Peru for potentially providing financial support to Hamdar while residing in Florida. If convicted, Hamdar faces a minimum 20-year sentence sending a strong signal to jihadists around the world that Peru and Latin America are off limits. A conviction could change the antiterrorism legal landscape in Latin America at a time when worldwide jihadists are on the move. A guilty verdict would mark the first time a member of an Islamic terrorist organization has been convicted in Latin America for *plotting* a terrorist attack. It would also constitute a de facto designation of Hezbollah as a foreign terrorist organization in Peru, a legal precedent that may spur additional designations throughout the region.

President Obama now has the perfect platform at APEC to broaden the coalition against the global jihadist movement and add a potential new partner in Peru to the U.S.-led coalition to counter ISIS. Let's hope he takes up the opportunity. Read the original article, from The Hill, here.