

**Hearing before a Joint Session of the House Homeland Security Committee and
The House Foreign Affairs Committee**

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**The Rise of Radicalism: Growing Terrorist Sanctuaries and
The Threat to the U.S. Homeland**

**Matthew G. Olsen
Former Director of the National Counterterrorism Center**

Thank you Chairman McCaul, Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Thompson, Ranking Member Engel and members of these two key committees. I appreciate this opportunity to appear before your committees to discuss the threat we face from terrorism and the steps we must take to confront these threats.

We meet this morning only a few days after the horrific terrorist attacks in Paris that took the lives of 129 people and shocked the city of Paris and the world. Today, our discussion of terrorism must begin with our expression of condolences for the victims and a declaration of solidarity with the French people.

The attacks in Paris serve both as a sobering reminder of the severity of the threats we face from terrorist groups of global reach and as a call for action in the ongoing struggle against terrorism and violent extremism. Indeed, the attacks last Friday give this hearing added urgency, as you convene to examine the threat to the United States and the steps we should take to counter terrorist groups both at home and abroad.

I will focus my brief remarks on the terrorist landscape today. Beginning with the Paris attacks, as the investigation continues to unfold, it now appears clear that these attacks were a deliberate, planned effort conducted by the terrorist group that calls itself the Islamic State, also known as ISIS. ISIS has publicly claimed responsibility for these attacks. And the suspected coordinator of these attacks, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who police in Paris may have targeted in a raid last night, is reportedly a member of ISIS.

The Paris attacks reflect an alarming trend. Over the past year, we have seen ISIS increase the complexity, severity, and pace of its external attacks. The Paris attacks were not simply inspired by ISIS, but rather it appears they were ISIS-planned and directed. And they were conducted as part of a coordinated effort to maximize casualties by striking some of the most vulnerable targets in the West: nightclubs, cafes, and sporting arenas.

The Paris attacks also demonstrate ISIS's expanding reach beyond its safe haven in Syria and Iraq. Indeed, we have seen ISIS inspired or directed attacks in Libya and Tunisia, recently in Beirut, and apparently with the downing of the Russian airliner in the Sinai Peninsula. And so far this year, there have 41 ISIS or ISIS-inspired attacks against

Western targets, already more than double the number of such attacks last year, according to reports. As the CIA director warned this week, ISIS likely has other attacks planned.

The number of Europeans and other Westerners who have gone to Syria to fight in this conflict is helping to drive this trend. Estimates vary, but reports suggest that the number of foreign fighters exceeds 30,000 and this includes as many as 4,000 or more Europeans, including many French, British, and German nationals. The number of Americans who have travelled to Syria, or have tried to, exceeds 250.

ISIS also has developed an unprecedented ability to communicate with its followers worldwide. The group attracts recruits through a sophisticated media and propaganda effort. ISIS has multiple websites, active Twitter feeds, YouTube channels, and online chat rooms, and it uses these platforms to radicalize and mobilize potential operatives in the United States and elsewhere.

In short, ISIS's proven intentions and increasing capability, as the Paris attacks reflect so starkly, warrant ranking the group as our most urgent terrorist threat.

At the same time, al-Qaida and its affiliates continue to pose a significant threat to the United States and our interests around the world. Indeed, al-Qaida is vying with ISIS to be the ideological leader of the global jihadist movement.

There is no doubt that U.S. counterterrorism pressure has led to the steady elimination of the group's senior leaders and limited the group's ability to operate, train, and recruit operatives. At the same time, the core leadership of al-Qaida continues to wield substantial influence over affiliated and allied groups, such as Yemen-based al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. On three occasions over the past several years, AQAP has sought to bring down an airliner bound for the United States. And there is reason to believe it still harbors this intent and substantial capability to carry out such a plot.

Here in the United States, there has been an uptick over the past year in the number of moderate-to-small scale plots. Lone actors or insular groups—often self-directed or inspired by overseas groups, like ISIS—pose the most serious threat to carry out attacks here. And homegrown violent extremists will likely continue gravitating to simpler plots that do not require advanced skills, outside training, or communication with others. The online environment serves a critical role in radicalizing and mobilizing homegrown extremists towards violence.

Highlighting the challenge this presents, the FBI Director said earlier this year that the FBI has homegrown violent extremist cases in every state, totaling about 900. Most of these cases reportedly are connected to ISIS.

Finally, three broad trends make it much more difficult for our counterterrorism professionals to prevent terrorist attacks here. First, it is increasingly difficult for the intelligence community to collect specific intelligence on terrorist intentions and the

status of developing plots. The illegal disclosure of our intelligence collection methods and techniques gave terrorists a roadmap on how to evade our surveillance.

Second, there has been a proliferation of rapidly evolving plots that emerge simply from an individual being urged to take action, and then quickly moving to attack. ISIS has adopted this approach, using social media and encrypted means of communicating to inspire others to carry out attacks. The compressed time frame for these plots to develop limits the opportunity for our intelligence and law enforcement professionals to disrupt potential attacks.

Third, instability and unrest in large parts of the Middle East and North Africa have led to a lack of security, border control, and effective governance. In the last few years, four states—Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen—have effectively collapsed. ISIS and other terrorist groups exploit these conditions to expand their reach and establish safe havens. Dozens of jihadist groups in as many as 18 countries have now pledged allegiance or support to ISIS.

In conclusion, the rise of ISIS and the overall threat landscape present enormous challenges to our counterterrorism, law enforcement and military professionals, and to policy makers across our government.

Our strategy to defeat ISIS and other terrorist groups must use all the tools of American power. It must include military action where necessary to eliminate leaders, deny these groups territory, and to remove imminent threats to our citizens. The strategy must seek to broaden and strengthen the international coalition that includes our European allies and partners in the region, who often are on the front lines of this fight.

We must also redouble our efforts to collect the intelligence necessary to obtain advance warning of developing plots and to ensure that our law enforcement officers have the tools to disrupt these plots. This strategy must counter the underlying message and ideology of ISIS. And the enduring lesson we have learned since 9/11 is that American leadership is indispensable to this fight.

I look forward to answering your questions.