

Testimony

United States House of Representatives

**House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade**

By

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on

After San Bernardino: The Future of ISIS-Inspired Attacks

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Thank you Chairman Poe, ranking member Keating, distinguished members of the committee for inviting me back today to discuss: After San Bernardino: The Future of ISIS Inspired Attacks. Am honored to be with my distinguished colleagues the Honorable Alberto Fernandez and Dr Christopher Swift. Please refer to the map provided by The Institute for The Study of War (ISW) which I will reference in my remarks.

The primary objective of the U.S. government remains protecting the homeland and the American people, including safeguarding American values both in the homeland and abroad. The San Bernardino attack following the Paris attacks, the downing of the Russian airliner and multiple attacks by ISIS in Lebanon and Turkey, all, once again, dramatically emphasize the danger and vulnerability of civilian populations to terrorism. While Americans who joined ISIS may return as terrorists, or other terrorists posing as refugees entering the U.S., or using liberal visa policies to enter from Europe, the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, believes that homegrown extremists pose the most significant threat to the U.S. homeland in 2016. These are most likely Americans or green card holders living in the U.S. who are motivated and inspired by the tenets of radical Islam to kill their fellow citizens. While I believe this is a daunting task to prevent such attacks, I am confident in U.S. law enforcement and intelligence capabilities, which are the best in the world, save for the 65 year experience of the Israelis, to rise to the challenge. Having the best defensive security systems in America is not sufficient, we must have as good an offense to stop and defeat ISIS. While the offensive capability is there, the strategy is not. Indeed, without an effective strategy we are destined to prolong the barbarism and the killing in the region while driving up the risk at home.

ISIS is part of our multi-generational struggle against radical Islam which will likely dominate the first half of the 21st century similar to the fight against communism, which dominated the second half of the 20th century. Radical Islam is morphing into a global Jihad with the expansion of Al Qaeda (AQ) and the extraordinary success of ISIS which has rapidly become the most successful terrorist organization in modern history. It is driven by a religious-based ideology with significant geopolitical objectives to establish an extensive caliphate that touches the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Europe, by dominating all Muslim lands, causing an apocalyptic event in Europe that carves out an ISIS enclave, and breaking down international order and systems as we know it today.

ISIS has 3 major goals:

The first is to defend Syria and Iraq. While ISIS has lost some territory, it views operations in Syria and Iraq as largely successful, because it still controls large swaths of territory, is recruiting successfully, 1.5 to 2k per month, maintaining tactical and operational initiative, and is able to logistically sustain its forces.

The second goal is to use its headquarters in Syria to expand in what ISIS terms the "near abroad" (in orange on your map with black or blue stars) by establishing affiliate organizations (Wilayats), which is a formal relationship in 9 countries and regions: Saudi Arabia, Libya, Egypt, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Nigeria, North Caucasus, and Algeria, with three in blue about to be formed. ISIS provides guidance and resources to these affiliates. The affiliates are attempting to control a swath of territory inside these countries and regions while undermining the local government. As we know, Wilayat Sinai is suspected of downing a Russian aircraft.

The third major goal is to influence the "far abroad," (on your map see areas in yellow) which are Muslim lands and countries that are supporting the coalition against ISIS (U.S., Europe, and Australia) by inspiring, motivating or directing followers to kill their fellow citizens, by averaging thousands of social media posts per day, and by returning fighters from Syria who are trained and motivated to attack their own citizens at home. ISIS attempts to divide and polarize these societies by weakening the people's resolve to support their government's efforts against ISIS and to fragment and polarize the non-Muslim and Muslim populations (non assimilated Muslim countries in Europe are particularly susceptible).

WHAT CAN BE DONE:

1. Defeat the Idea – National leaders and Muslim clerics must undermine the political and religious ideology with not just what is wrong, but what is right. The battle is within Islam itself where in the Arab world this battle is intersecting with authoritarian regimes and family monarchies failure to politically reform and to adjust to the needs of their societies. Therefore, we are fighting a political and religious ideology which draws its origin from the very strict interpretation of the Quran and Hadith as well as the intolerance of Wahhabism and Salafism . Political leaders such as al-Sisi and King Abdullah have referred to it as a “religious revolution.” Yet U.S. policy fails to define radical Islam, or explain it, nor understand it. How can we possibly defeat radical Islam if we don't understand it? Knowing the kind of war you are fighting is the first priority of a national or military leader. Given this purposeful misunderstanding or self deception, at best, by not acknowledging this narrowly focused Islamic ideology, it creates an unnecessary condition where all Muslims are brought under suspicion. Law abiding, faith based, traditional or modern Muslims who would do no harm to their fellow man and resent any association with radical Islam, deserve better treatment.

2. Destroy the Safe Havens – No insurgency was ever defeated where a safe haven existed. The major lesson of 9/11 was that the AQ safe haven was allowed to exist in Afghanistan for many years even after the AQ successful attacks on the US Embassies in Africa (1998) and the USS Cole (2000). The longer terrorists are allowed safe haven, history advises, the terrorists become more experienced, lethal and ambitious. The result was 9/11. Iraq and Syria, particularly Syria, are ISIS safe havens. Their recruiting, command and control, logistics, and ambitious expansion all originates in the safe haven.

Recognize that the current strategy of relying on local defense forces without sufficient numbers, arms, training, and not maximizing air power protracts the war against ISIS for years, unnecessarily. Throw out “strategic patience” and replace it with “strategic urgency” to defeat ISIS. While the military effort in Iraq and Syria is significantly under-resourced, the political effort which is so necessary to achieve a military victory is also flawed.

-- Iraq – The strategic political objective should be to reduce Iranian influence in Iraq while moving PM Abadi to enfranchise the reconcilable Sunnis. Sunni lands cannot be reclaimed and held without a sizeable Sunni commitment of tens of thousands (during the Iraq surge, in 2007, the Sunni Sons of Iraq peaked at 102K). This must be a major diplomatic effort which can be assisted by former Ambassador Ryan Crocker, who enjoyed previous success with the same issue during the surge.

-- Syria – The civil war must end if the Sunnis are to reclaim territory held by ISIS and AQ. Conceding to the Russians that Assad and the Alawite regime will stay, in contradiction to U.S. policy since 2011 that Assad must go, is a

huge strategic mistake. The opposition forces will not stop fighting while Assad remains. A better option is to attempt to change the momentum against the Assad regime with safe zones for refugees and a NFZ to protect them. Also an effort should be made to separate from Jabat Al Nusra (AQ), the Islamic organizations that are not radical and reunite them with the moderate opposition. The Sunni Arab states will assist such a Syrian Sunni force on the ground to destroy the ISIS safe haven.

3. Marginalize the Affiliates - The 9/11 Commission recommended a global alliance to defeat radical Islam. In parallel with destroying ISIS safe havens in Iraq and Syria, partnering with allies to marginalize or where possible defeat ISIS affiliates is critical. Otherwise ISIS will reemerge at an affiliate location, likely, Libya. Sharing intelligence, technology, equipment and training is a proven winner in harnessing the collective resources of an alliance in defeating a common enemy. It was after all NATO's proven success in helping to collapse the Soviet Union.

In conclusion, the following, extracted in part from a recent ISW report: ISIS and AQ pose the most imminent threat to the security and values of the United States and Europe. Although these groups currently lack the ability to destroy us militarily, the danger they present is no less existential for that. Already their actions are causing the peoples of the West to turn against one another, to fear and suspect their neighbors, to constrain their freedoms, and to disrupt their ordinary lives. The nearly-unprecedented flow of refugees from the horrors of constant and brutal warfare threatens to overwhelm many peaceful societies, creating new conflicts and reviving old ones. ISIS and AQ have shattered states, undermined others, and are threatening more. They are destroying the international

order in the Middle East and Africa and seeking to spread that destruction to Europe and Asia.

The success of these radical Islamist military organizations comes only partly from their own strength and skill. It results also from a general collapse of the international order driven partly by the withdrawal of the U.S. from supporting that order, partly by the irresponsible passivity and free-riding of most European states, partly by the unrealized expectations of the people of the Middle East and partly from the active attempts of Iran, China, and Russia to dismantle all or part of a global order designed to favor our values and interests and to replace it with one that favors theirs.

Understanding what is happening and why, is the basic ingredient to developing achievable strategies. The U.S. is facing global security challenges on a scale not seen since the rise of the Soviet Union post World War II. While complex and difficult, it is certainly not hopeless and the world has never needed American leadership more than it does today.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

