

ISIS: The Existential Threat to the United States

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GOVT 380
July 4, 2016

It has been said that the Islamic State is not an existential threat to the United States, but rather, that this group is nothing more than a bunch of killers with good social media. However, if they can change the manner in which American citizens live their lives, they have been successful in threatening the manner in which the United States exists. From the coordinated Paris attacks in November of 2015, to the bombing of a Belgium airport in March, to the more recent attack in Orlando, the Islamic State has shown their willingness to continue to slaughter innocent civilians. The Islamic state is more than a terrorist group, but is indeed an insurgency. Though terrorism is one of their main strategies, the main goal of this group is to overthrow the governments of not only the west, but the entire world and to institute their own government with the foundation of Sharia Law. This is not a desire for power or control, but rather a prophecy that is stated in the Qur'an. According to their views, this is all for the glory of Allah. The ultimate goal of this group can be summarized into a statement made by an official of ISIS: "I say to America that the Islamic Caliphate has been established. Don't be cowards and attack us with drones. Instead send your soldiers, the ones we humiliated in Iraq. We will humiliate them everywhere, God willing, and we will raise the flag of Allah in the White House" (Kristian 2014).

Many critics blame the premature removal of troops from Iraq as the cause for a new terrorist organization to arise. Following the attacks of 9/11, America announced a War on Terror against al-Qaeda. Abu Musab Zarqawi began to organize attacks on the West as well as the Shia community for the lack of strict adherence to the Qur'an. His group was known as Tawhid wa al-Jihad and also consisted of the few remaining members of Saddam's group (Muir 2016). Under president George W. Bush, troops were sent into Iraq to prevent any future terroristic attacks and eliminate such threats. For a moment in time, most of al-Qaeda and other

terrorist leaders were killed and virtually none of the insurgence was left. A presidential candidate made a promise to repair broken relations with the Muslim world. Though this promise meant well, the decisions made to fulfill this promise have been highly questionable. Barack Obama became president in 2008 and three years later, pulled the last of troops out of Iraq. Not only did troops leave Iraq, but essentially all intelligence and counterterrorism projects taking place in this area were put to a halt. In an area as unstable as the Middle-East and more particularly, Iraq, allowing this shaky government to control the area without the support of the United States military was extremely dangerous (Pletka 2014). As a result of this withdrawal, it allowed for the Islamic State to gain support and grow into a dangerous and existential threat to the United States.

The Islamic State insists they cannot change from the rules written by the Prophet Muhammad. Many Muslims reject the Islamic State as a religious group, however, this group has been proven to be strict followers of the Qur'an and its laws in comparison to other Muslims. A translation of the Qur'an 9:111 says,

Indeed, Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties [in exchange] for that they will have Paradise. They fight in the cause of Allah, so they kill and are killed. [It is] a true promise [binding] upon Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Qur'an. And who is truer to his covenant than Allah? (“Al-Qur'an”).

This verse pertains to jihad, which translates to “holy war”, and suggests that the true believers of Islam are only those who are willing to kill others who don't believe and be killed fighting for this cause. Though the vast majority of Muslims are peaceful, the Islamic State must be

recognized as the threat it really is, radical Islam. The continued hesitation by political leaders including the current White House administration to address this threat as radical Islam will delay the ability to successfully eradicate it. *The Atlantic* made a statement in regards to the group which said, "There is a temptation to rehearse this observation- that jihadists are modern secular people, with modern political concerns, wearing medieval religious disguise..." (Wood 2015). This temptation must be resisted by both the political leaders of this nation as well as the Muslim community in order to effectively identify and eliminate the threat that the Islamic State poses.

It is believed that at least 100 Americans have successfully traveled to the Middle-East to participate in jihad with the Islamic State. The recruitment tactics by the Islamic state have been extremely effective through the use of social media. Radical Islamic believers as well as the 'lone wolf' individual are amongst the the most recruited individuals from the United States and around the world. These lone wolves strive to have a cause and purpose in their life. Through its 24-hour operation, IS has successfully given the lone wolf value. Islamic State accounts are not limited to Twitter, but also include Skype, email, and other forms of social media (Callimachi 2015). Though most would assume the group would target males to recruit, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of females recruited. The recruitment videos and social media campaigns focus on drawing the women into support roles such as marrying a husband true to the jihadist and Islamic cause and also giving these women the opportunity to serve their religion and God (Baker 2014). As its effective methods in recruiting through social media and propaganda are used to increase the size of its military, the threat it poses to the world increases as well.

The most recent Islamic State attack in the United States was on an Orlando gay night club which left 49 dead and 53 injured. The San Bernardino terrorist attack occurred in late December of 2015 and was the result of a radicalized couple who shot and killed 14 innocent people. Another attack took place at a Mohamed cartoon contest in Texas as two gunmen began shooting, but fortunately, were shot before they could kill any of those attending the event. Though all of these killings were a result of radical Islam, the majority of political leadership refused to admit it as such. Though attacks have been carried out on the west, the large majority of ISIS attacks have taken place in Europe and the Middle East. These continued attacks all over the world show that the Islamic State is capable of striking anywhere at any time, especially due to its increased capability to influence homegrown terrorism. According to CIA director, John Brennan, following the bombing in Istanbul, there is an increased concern for the possibility of planned terrorist attacks in the United States (Mcshane 2016). If an intelligence officer who spends their career identifying such threats has an increased feeling of concern for the wellbeing of the United States, how much more worried should the American public feel? Brennan's fear of future attacks against the United States is legitimate. According to sources, the organization has been using mustard gas on Syrian forces. Furthermore, there was a recent report of a terror suspect in Brussels had a bag filled with explosives and animal excrement (Mcfadyen 2016). NBC News says, "Those who track ISIS trackers say the terrorist group's current arsenal includes mustard gas and chlorine" (Miklaszewski and Kube 2016). The statement made of their current arsenal is only what is known by intelligence sources. However, it is possible that they are in the process of obtaining and developing more biological and nuclear weapons if they have not already done so. The events that have recently taken place show that this terror group is attempting to partake in a new level of warfare and is indeed a very serious threat. The potential

casualties resulting from the use of weapons of mass destruction, which include both biological and nuclear weapons, would be too many to calculate much less imagine. But it could easily be considered the very existential threat to the United States that the president so cavalierly dismisses.

The first step in ridding of this evil is to recognize the threat which the United States faces. The leadership of the United States should be first in recognizing the Islamic State as radical Islamic terrorist organization. Out of fear of being criticized by the Muslim community both domestically and internationally, American leadership has been hesitant in these assertions. Along with identifying this threat, the terrorist group cannot continue to expand and succeed if its income is cut off. A large amount of the profit that the Islamic States makes is received through selling its resources, especially oil. If these resources are targeted by airstrikes, this will play a significant role in defeating the group. Another major contribution to its income is obtained through donations from private citizens who believe in its cause. Discouraging neighboring countries, especially Saudi Arabia, from sending donations to this group can also play a pivotal role in interrupting the income of the Islamic State. Ultimately, regardless of the name of a terrorist organization, the values displayed in Hezbollah, al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State, will be similar to those of future terrorist organizations in the Middle-East. It is the unity of nations all over the world to know how to effectively contain such organizations before they become a legitimate military force like the previous organizations who have been able to effectively do so.

Thus, the Islamic State is in fact an existential threat to the United States. Presently, barring the possible attainment of a nuclear device, the group may not currently be able to utterly destroy the United States and its territory. However, this group certainly has the capability to

forever change the American way of life. If its citizens change their way of behavior out of fear of terrorism, they are less free. If they are unable to travel globally, express themselves in writing and speaking less often out of fear of offending others, the United States of America becomes something less than “The Land of the Free”. She is certainly no longer the “Home of the Brave”. Though she may not be destroyed physically, it will be of little solace if her very character is. For what will the “shining City on a Hill” become if she no longer shines and what hope will remain in the world?

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