

WHAT COMES NEXT, AND HOW DO WE HANDLE IT?

ISIS will strike America

By Michael Morell

I was an intelligence officer for 33 years. When intelligence officers write a brief, they start with the bottom line. Here it is: ISIS poses a major threat to the U.S. and to U.S. interests abroad, and that threat is growing every day.

The nature and significance of the threat flow from the fact that ISIS is—all at the same time—a terrorist group, a state and a revolutionary political movement. We have never faced an adversary like it.

As a terrorist group, ISIS poses a threat to the homeland. That threat is largely indirect and involves ISIS's ability to radicalize young Americans to conduct attacks here. The FBI has over 900 open investigations into homegrown extremists, the vast majority radicalized by ISIS, and a large number of those investigations relate to individuals who may be plotting here.

While the sophistication of homegrown attacks is likely to be fairly low, the potential exists for the quantity of these attacks to be large. The number of ISIS followers dwarfs the number of followers that al-Qaeda ever had. Over time, the indirect threat, if not significantly degraded, will become a direct one—that is, ISIS will have the ability to plan and direct attacks on the homeland from the group's safe havens in Iraq and Syria, just like it did in Paris.

Such attacks are deeply concerning because they carry the potential to be much more sophisticated and complex—and therefore more dangerous—than homegrown attacks, again, just like in Paris recently, or London in 2005 or even 9/11. And in news that should get everyone's attention, ISIS has shown an interest in weapons of mass destruction.

The attacks in Paris were the first manifestation of an effort by ISIS to put together an attack capability in Europe—an effort it began less than a year ago. The head of the U.K.'s domestic security agency recently warned that ISIS is now planning mass-casualty attacks in Britain. His concerns are well-founded. We will not be far behind.

As a state, ISIS poses a threat to regional stability—a threat to the very territorial integrity of the current nation-states, a threat to inflame the entire region in sectarian war. All this in a part of the world that still provides almost a third of the world's oil supply; a region that is home to one of America's closest allies, Israel; and a region that is home to a set of close American allies—the Gulf Arab states—that are willing to resist Iran's push for regional hegemony.

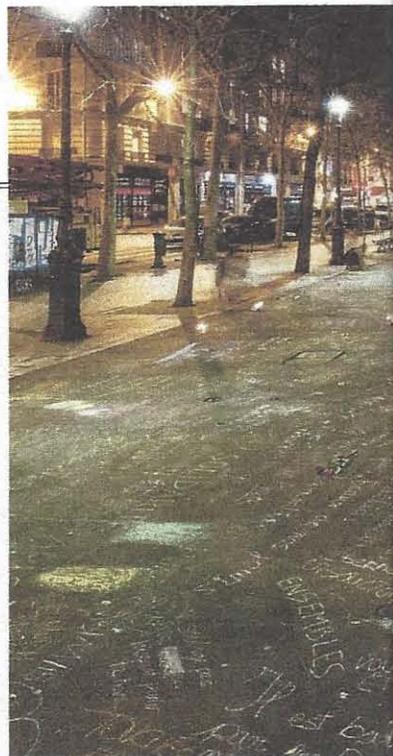
As a revolutionary political movement, ISIS is gaining affiliates among extremist groups around the world. They are signing up for what ISIS desires as its objective: a global caliphate where day-to-day life is governed by extreme religious views. In the mind of ISIS, its global caliphate would extend to the U.S.

When they join ISIS, these affiliates evolve from focusing on local issues to focusing on establishing an extension of the caliphate. And their targets evolve from local to international ones. This is the story of the bombing of the Russian airline by an ISIS group in the Egyptian Sinai.

ISIS has gained affiliates faster than al-Qaeda ever did. From none a year ago, there are now militant groups that have sworn allegiance to ISIS in nearly 20 countries. They have conducted attacks that have killed Americans, and they carry the potential to grab large amounts of territory. Libya, for instance, is a place where this could happen in the near term.

An intelligence officer has many jobs. One is to describe for a President the threats that we face as a nation. Another is to look a President in the eye when his or her policies are not working and say so. Mr. President, the downing of the Russian airliner and the attacks in Paris make it crystal clear that our ISIS strategy is not working.

Morell is the former deputy director of the CIA and has twice served as acting director. He is the author of The Great War of Our Time.



✓ Terror's lineage

By Kamel Daoud

In every myth, the monster has a father and a mother. And so it is with ISIS: its father is George W. Bush's America, and its mother is Saudi Arabia. The former provided it with pretext in the disastrous invasion of Iraq. This invasion was seen as a rape of the Arab world. It was based on a lie—the false link between Sept. 11 and Saddam Hussein—and it destroyed the West's moral superiority. As for ISIS's mother, this strange theocracy is simultaneously allied with the West through the Saudi royal family and opposed to the West by an ideology that is the product of a vicious clergy. Saudi Arabia remains the ideological factory for jihadism with an industry of theologians it supports financially. They propagate their vision through books and TV channels throughout the Arab world and far beyond. Saudi Arabia is both a victim and a source of terrorist ideas.

Daoud edits the Algerian daily Le Quotidien d'Oran and is the author of the novel The Meursault Investigation