



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on September 12, 2014

“No Immediate Threat,” No Authorization, No Problem for Obama’s War

The morning after President Obama made his case to the American people as to why the nation’s security depends on decisive military action against the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the *New York Times* published a front-page story announcing: “American intelligence agencies have concluded that [ISIS] poses no immediate threat to the United States.” Indeed, the president conceded as much when outlining his plan for building an international coalition to “degrade and ultimately destroy” the terrorist network that he refers to ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant):



“While we have not yet detected specific plotting against our homeland, ISIL leaders have threatened America and our allies. Our Intelligence Community believes that thousands of foreigners — including Europeans and some Americans — have joined them in Syria and Iraq. Trained and battle-hardened, these fighters could try to return to their home countries and carry out deadly attacks.”

A lot of things “could” happen, but even the world’s reigning superpower and its allies can’t possibly go to war to prevent them all. Even if the president is correct in determining a need to confront the ISIS fighters in the Middle East now, the apocalyptic pronouncements from members of Congress over the past few weeks, magnified in media reports, over the perceived threat to us here in the “homeland” might lead one to believe the nation is already in extreme peril.

ISIS is a “direct threat to our homeland,” according to Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.) It’s “an existential threat,” cried Sen. Lindsey Graham, the South Carolina Republican who envisions “an American city in flames.” America is “in the most dangerous position we’ve ever been in,” declared Sen. Jim Inhofe, (R-Okla.) “They’re crazy out there. And they are rapidly developing a method to blow up a major U.S. city.” And who should know better than Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, who has called the Islamic State a threat “beyond anything we’ve ever seen” and an “imminent threat to every interest we have.”

Yet even as these frantic warnings were being uttered, the Associated Press on August 22 published this news:

WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI and Homeland Security Department say there are no specific or credible terror threats to the U.S. homeland from the Islamic State militant group.

An intelligence bulletin, issued to state and local law enforcement, says while there’s no credible threat to the U.S. as a result of recent American airstrikes in Iraq, officials remain concerned that Islamic State supporters could attack overseas targets with little warning.

And on Wednesday morning, hours before the president made his address to the nation, Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson, said in a speech, “We know of no credible information that ISIL is



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planning to attack the homeland at present.”

To be sure, attacks on American overseas targets would be nothing to take lightly, but that possibility is always present, as is the possibility the president cites of terrorists with Western passports coming here to attempt lethal acts of terror. But we are hardly confronted with the imminent prospect of Armageddon in our cities, as some of the above comments suggest. And while Obama claims the campaign he is undertaking falls within his authority to protect the American people, there is the very real possibility that continued and increased military intervention in civil wars in Syria and Iraq will increase, rather than decrease, danger to Americans, especially Americans overseas.

“It’s pretty clear that upping our involvement in Iraq and Syria makes it more likely that we will be targeted by the people we are attacking,” said Andrew Liepman, a former deputy director at the National Counterterrorism Center and now a senior policy analyst at the RAND Corporation. While a recent *NBC News/Wall Street Journal* poll shows nearly half of the country thinks the United States is in greater danger of a major terrorist attack than before 9/11, Daniel Benjamin, the State Department’s top counterterrorism advisor during Obama’s first term, attributes that reaction the way the ISIS threat has been exaggerated by politicians and the media.

“It’s hard to imagine a better indication of the ability of elected officials and TV talking heads to spin the public into a panic, with claims that the nation is honeycombed with sleeper cells, that operatives are streaming across the border into Texas or that the group will soon be spraying Ebola virus on mass transit systems — all on the basis of no corroborated information,” Benjamin, now a scholar at Dartmouth College, told the *New York Times*.

“The cowardice in Congress, never to be underestimated, is outrageous,” the *Times* declared. “Some lawmakers have made it known that they would rather not face a war authorization vote shortly before midterm elections, saying they’d rather sit on the fence for a while to see whether an expanded military campaign starts looking like a success story or a debacle. By avoiding responsibility, they allow President Obama free rein to set a dangerous precedent that will last well past this particular military campaign.” Bruce Ackerman, a professor of law and political science at Yale, contends that by issuing a declaration of war on his own, Obama has made “a decisive break in the American constitutional tradition. Nothing attempted by his predecessor, George W. Bush, remotely compares in imperial hubris.”

White House officials, briefing reporters before the president’s speech Wednesday night, said the president’s authority for the military campaign he was about to announce is covered by the Authorization for the Use of Military force passed by Congress in 2001. But that was authorization to go after those responsible for carrying out the 9/11 attacks, namely al-Qaeda. ISIS (or ISIL) was not in existence at that time.

Ironically, Obama called for repeal of the 2001 authorization in a speech he delivered at the National Defense University in Washington in May 2013. “Unless we discipline our thinking, our definitions, our actions, we may be drawn into more wars we don’t need to fight, or continue to grant presidents unbound powers more suited for traditional armed conflicts between nation states,” the president said at that time.

Unbound power is not suitable at any time regardless of what kind of conflict the nation undertakes. The right of the people to have the question of war or peace decided by our elected representative and senators in Congress is a key barrier to the aggrandizement of unlimited power by the chief executive.



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“The constitution supposes, what the History of all Governments demonstrates, that the Executive is the branch of power most interested in war, and most prone to it,” wrote James Madison. The “Father of the Constitution” also warned: “The loss of liberty at home is to be charged to the provisions against danger, real or imagined, from abroad.”

Photo of ISIS attack: AP Images



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