

OPINION

The Front Burner

ISIS: More U.S. boots on ground?

Paris attacks should beckon force to crush terrorists

BY DUSTIN BERNA | Guest columnist

Should last month's Paris attacks summon a Western invasion to crush ISIS?

Unfortunately, yes. The goal of ISIS is to establish a global caliphate (religious state) with its capital being in Jerusalem and satellite offices in Washington, Rome, Tehran and Paris. ISIS sees itself as the reincarnation of Muhammad and his caliphate; however, its objective is to ultimately surpass what Muhammad and his first generation of followers did and obtain world domination. To do this, it is ISIS' religious obligation to work toward our eradication.

A global caliphate will not happen; however, a regional one has happened, and if individuals and movements keep pledging allegiance to them, it will continue to spread throughout the Sunni world. ISIS has a global network of supporters that see it as their religious duty to conduct acts of suicidal terrorism on American soil, and this threatens the foundations of our free and open society. The only way this network can be defeated is the total obliteration of ISIS and to utilize any domestic tool we have to detain its supporters who are living among us. The Paris attacks were a dress rehearsal for what the terrorists are capable of doing. Many Western politicians argue we are at war — yet their strategy to defeat ISIS is inherently flawed.

Currently, our airstrikes are destroying the weapons and military stockpiles controlled by ISIS. However, the collateral destruction and civilian deaths are facilitating more support for ISIS. The oil-resources and antiquities sales have made ISIS wealthier than any terrorist organization in history. Increased military support to the Kurds is essential; however, they can't defeat ISIS alone. The Sunnis support ISIS in massive numbers and no Islamic state is willing to send troops into a war zone and risk its own security. The point of demarcation between moderate Sunnis and ISIS sympathizers is impossible to distinguish unless we're on the ground. The moderates have no place to turn — on one side is ISIS, and on the other are repressive Shia governments — so they flee and become refugees.

I am not a fan of Russian President Vladimir Putin or his aggressive foreign policy; however, we must reevaluate what he is doing as it relates to Syria. The Syrian government has absolute support from the Syrian Shia and Christian populations, and they will do whatever they can to protect the Assad regime. As for the Syrian Sunni opposition, we are foolishly viewing the Sunnis as our friends and have sent them tons of financial and military aid.

They have not pledged allegiance to the ISIS caliphate; however, they have refused to fight it. ISIS has the military power to invade the areas controlled by the Syrian Sunni opposition, but has refused to do so because the Sunnis are the ones who are fighting the Syrian government. Because of this, ISIS has been able to continue to expand its caliphate into Libya, Yemen and Afghanistan. The Russians understand this, and their military campaign against the Syrian opposition does help Assad and significantly hinders ISIS expansion. Americans will die if we do not develop a more drastic military policy to obliterate ISIS.

Prior to 9/11, we knew almost nothing about Islamic extremism and were oblivious to the degree of religious intolerance that existed outside of our borders. When Muhammad died, the Islamic faith split, and it resulted in a civil war between Sunnis and Shias that has raged for centuries. Our problem is that we cannot comprehend this degree of intolerance or the irrationality of holding a grudge for more than 1,500 years. What we must do is end the indecisiveness and weakness associated with the current administration's foreign policy and overcome the ignorant and haphazard ideas of democracy and occupation that still plague us from the previous administration. To do this, NATO — with Russian support — must invade and eradicate ISIS.

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Franklin D. Roosevelt famously counseled Americans, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Yet, a recent Gallup poll indicates that many of today's crop of Americans have ditched FDR's comforting declaration.

Terrorism reigns as America's greatest problem, according to the poll; 16 percent tapped terrorism over the runner-up, the economy. That's up from 3 percent in November 2014.

That jump — perhaps sparked by November's Paris attacks — explains a new CNN/ORC Poll that for the first time in the history of the poll found that a majority of Americans (53 percent) favored sending ground troops to Iraq or Syria to smother ISIS.

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham proposes America deploy 10,000 troops to the region. Such an approach squares with one of today's columnists, who argues that the U.S. and NATO should invade and eradicate ISIS.

On the other hand, our second columnist — like the 76 percent of Americans in a November Reuters/Ipsos poll who opposed dispatching conventional ground troops to the region to combat ISIS — considers putting boots on the ground folly with historical precedent. The U.S., he argues, must develop new warfare and diplomatic techniques to stop ISIS' exportation of terror.

By the numbers

■ **10,000+** The number of men, women and children ISIS has executed in Iraq and Syria since June 2014, according to The Syria Observatory for Human Rights.

■ **8,783** The number of airstrikes (as of Dec. 9) the U.S. and coalition forces have conducted to degrade and defeat ISIS.

■ **\$11 million** The average daily cost of operations against ISIS.



Western politicians argue we are at war, yet their strategy to defeat ISIS is inherently flawed.

Past mistakes show more troops won't boost safety

BY JEREMI SURI | Guest columnist

The great leaders in American history learned from the mistakes of the past. It's something we ought to remember when it comes to sending ground troops to eradicate the Islamic State.

After the failed isolationist policies of the early 20th century, presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman spent billions to rebuild America's adversaries and deepen international cooperation after the Second World War.

After more than a decade of escalating force deployments in Vietnam and unsuccessful counterinsurgency efforts, President Ronald Reagan withdrew American ground forces from what looked like a new Vietnam — the disintegrating country of Lebanon in the early 1980s.

Roosevelt, Truman and Reagan were tough, but they were also strategic. They were honest in assessing past failures and determined to implement better alternatives, with realistic plans for success.

Since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the United States has pursued a policy of direct military intervention throughout the Middle East. We have deployed hundreds of thousands of service members to the region and spent more than a trillion dollars on military and development assistance. American forces have successfully overturned three regimes — in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

President Barack Obama has called for another regime change in Syria. The United States has also deployed the most sophisticated unmanned aerial bombers ("drones") ever used to strike thousands of targets — often assassinating terrorists in their hideouts. U.S. Special Forces have entered the region repeatedly to capture and kill threatening figures, most famously al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden in 2011.

These costly actions have failed to make the United States safer. And that is exactly why sending ground troops to eradicate ISIS is not something we should do.

President George W. Bush promised to "win" what he called the "Global War on Terror," but when he left office in 2009, Afghanistan and Iraq remained violent nests for terrorist groups. Obama initially increased American forces in Afghanistan, and he escalated the use of drone strikes. Seven years later, the terrorists continue to dominate much of the Middle East and Central Asia.

These regions have consistently become more violent, unstable and dangerous with every deployment of American forces from 2001 to 2015. Our military interventions have destroyed old sources of stability, empowered new radicals, inspired followers for them, and provided high-value American targets in easy reach. Our military has proved that it can defeat any other regular army, but it is poorly suited to fight highly organized and ideological insurgencies in a region filled with popular distrust of the United States.

Training regional forces to fight on our behalf has not worked either; our surrogates seem to melt away when the first terrorists arrive. In many cases, they have joined the other side, turning the weapons we supplied against us. Our local training has increased regional disorder and the terrorist threat, and it has depleted our treasury.

These are the historical facts. We can argue about the causes for American military failures since 2001, but we must admit to them if we are going to improve current policy. After the horrible recent attacks by the Islamic State and other terrorists, we simply cannot afford to repeat another decade of counterproductive war in the Middle East. Tough talk about sending American troops back to the region is irresponsible unless it is accompanied by a persuasive explanation of why this time will be different.

The challenge for American leaders is to create new policy alternatives that include various military and nonmilitary tools. That is what Roosevelt, Truman and Reagan did during their presidencies. Isolating and defeating the terrorists is necessary, and it requires careful steps, not a rush to fan the flames of a rising fire. We have already burned ourselves badly in a decade of overzealous activity.

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package are no small feats. Ryan and other leaders from both parties deserve credit. The spending bill is an ungainly mess, but it's far preferable to having the government shut down or continue running on autopilot as it has been.

Ryan, though he's had some missteps in his first weeks as speaker, was adept at cementing the deal, which his predecessor, John Boehner, set in motion. Republicans abandoned attempts to cut off funds for Planned Parenthood and for the settlement of refugees from Syria — both issues that had threatened to trigger a showdown — while Democrats yielded on oil exports and other items. Ultimately, though, the toxic rhetoric on the campaign trail is bound to bleed into the legislative process, putting in jeopardy even modest compromises such as the spending bill.

The presidential candidates were reckless as they stoked fear Tuesday night. "America has been betrayed," Christie said in his opening statement. "Think of the fathers of Los Angeles, who tomorrow will head off to work and wonder about the safety of their wives and their children."

Bush raised the specter of "our civilized way of life" being destroyed by the Islamic State. Fiorina spoke of "dangerous" incompetence in government.

Ryan, in his "Confident America" speech this month, argued against such antics. "After giving it a lot of thought, this is what I think: We want America to be confident again." He blamed President Obama for "slice and dice" politics (in truth, this far predates Obama), and urged Republicans not to "demonize" and "polarize."

Hard-liners on both sides raised objections to the tax-and-spending compromises. But Ryan predicted passage — a rare victory for reason over rage — this time. "I think everybody can point to something that gives them a reason to be in favor of both of these bills," he said. The question is how long the upbeat young speaker can prevail over the worry and anger his party's presidential candidates spread.

Ryan, departing the room, was momentarily defeated when he tried to open the glass door. "Oh — it's a pull, not a push," he said. It's going to take a lot of both, Mr. Speaker.

National Viewpoint

Upbeat nuggets amid GOP's doom and gloom

It was a night of fear and loathing in Las Vegas. "We have people across this country who are scared to death," said Chris Christie. "Everywhere in America is a target for these terrorists."

Donald Trump informed viewers that "our country is in a state of control" and raised the possibility that "we're just going to go weaker, weaker, and just disintegrate."

Ben Carson: "The United States of America is the patient, and the patient is in critical condition."

Jeb Bush: "Our freedom is under attack. Our economy is under water."

Marc Rubio: "The president has left us unsafe."

Carly Fiorina: "Like all of you, I'm angry."

If Americans weren't already feeling angry and unsafe before they watched Tuesday night's Republican presidential debate, they surely would have been feeling furious and frightened by

the end. So when I went to the Capitol on Wednesday morning, to the basement rooms where House Republicans were having their weekly meeting, I thought somebody was playing a little joke.

There, decorating the lectern and the backdrop for GOP leaders' news conference was a Twitter-style hashtag advertising House Republicans' new theme: "Confident America." Was this meant to be ironic?

Evidently not. House Speaker Paul Ryan, who earlier this month gave an upbeat speech by that name, emerged from his caucus meeting and delivered a few remarks that would seem to place the Wisconsin Republican in a different party — perhaps a different country — than the GOP's doom-and-gloom presidential candidates.

Ryan boasted about "bipartisan, bicameral compromise" on major spending and tax bills that were a "big win" for jobs, manufacturing and foreign policy. He



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hailed "one of the biggest steps toward a rewrite of our tax code that we have made in many years." And for those who don't like it? "Look, in divided government, you don't get everything you want," he said. "And I understand that some people don't like that is the compromise that we have."

The juxtaposition was jarring: at night the presidential candidates' rage and alarm and, the next morning, the speaker's chipper calm. The late Mario Cuomo liked to say, "You campaign in poetry. You govern in prose." This 2016 GOP race goes further: The presidential candidates are campaigning in hysterical shouts, while Republican congressional leaders are trying to govern in measured voices.

In this environment, the "omnibus" spending bill and tax