

Balboni: Beheading, the latest warning sign

August 22, 2014 by MICHAEL BALBONI



relatively unknown before the Sept. 11 attacks. However, the assassination should be seen for what it is: another effort in a global advertising campaign for the Islamic State group.

The group is a more capable threat than al-Qaida. Through its weapons, training and tactical experience, it has demonstrated it is an army, not just a terrorist group hiding in caves.

It also is a sophisticated practitioner of global recruitment. It uses the Internet and is openly seeking enlistees on the streets of London. The fact that the executioner on the video of Foley's beheading has a British accent indicates the worldwide reach the group has developed.

Its sophisticated recruiting techniques include utilizing social media and web-messaging technology to attract recruits from the West. This is significant because in targeting Western recruits, the Islamic State will potentially enlist fighters who will be trained and combat tested for potential attacks on Western countries. Also significant is that if it can recruit in London, then it can attack in London. The import for the United States is clear: A threat against a European ally should be viewed as one step removed from a direct threat on us.

U.S. security forces have always considered a threat to Europe as a threat to the United States. We've seen terrorists conjure up multinational plots in Europe, and attempt to carry them out in the United States. The liquid bomb plot for U.S.-

The video of the beheading of freelance journalist James Foley brings to mind the horrific murder of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl in February 2002. As stunned as we are by the senseless and cowardly brutality, Foley's murder should not be viewed as a Pearl redux.

To some Americans, the brutal beheading earlier this week was their first awareness that the Islamic State group -- formerly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria -- even exists, just as Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida were



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bound airliners in 2006 is an example of that. Therefore, just because threats or plans against the United States by the Islamic State have not been identified thus far, it would be a mistake to view the group as confined to the region. We know the ocean between its continent and ours offers little protection in an Internet age.

The world needs to recognize the Islamic State's threat and work on a multinational response. There needs to be a coordinated military strategy with support from our Western and Middle East allies, including limited "boots on the ground" and special forces support as well as calibrated and sustained air support. There is no negotiating with a group like this, the only option is to neutralize them or they will grow and threaten other Western interests. Lest we forget the proximity of Pakistan and its nuclear arsenal. What would our options be if the Islamic State moved into Pakistan?

Though the Islamic State threat remains an asymmetrical one, (meaning there is no nation-state to respond to or hold accountable), the way to stop the threat is the same: target its leadership, stop its supply of arms and funding, and focus on its operations and strategic strategies to stop its attacks.

President Barack Obama is right to say the United States "will be vigilant and we will be relentless" against the Islamic State and will "do what's necessary to see that justice is done."

But given the group's global reach, this job should not fall to the United States alone. Only organized cooperation among countries will weaken the group and empower those who oppose its actions.

With Foley's beheading, the Islamic State has shown its modus operandi. It would be a mistake not to recognize the group for what it is.

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