



Obama Faces Dilemma in Developing Strategy for ISIS, Observers Say

By Todd Beamon

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President Barack Obama and Congress are back in Washington next week — and the focus will clearly be on the administration's efforts to develop a strategy to defeat the Islamic State (ISIS) after the beheading of two American journalists in recent weeks.

"We have to kill these people – and that's all there is to it," Pennsylvania Rep. Tom Marino told Newsmax on Friday. "ISIS is a terrorist organization that wants to promote their extreme beliefs. They're doing just what they said they would do. This is a group that has accelerated the pace."

But carrying out this objective raises many critical issues for the administration, including those challenging Obama's basic goal of not putting boots back on the ground in Iraq and raising the obvious risk that the United States could become involved in prolonged civil wars in both Baghdad and Syria, observers told Newsmax.

"We want to send a signal that beheading any American citizen should be beyond the reach of retaliation," said Justin Logan, director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute. "We should be trying to do maximum damage in retaliation to the Islamic State while doing no damage to the United States."

"The question is, how much is enough?" Logan said.

"We face a lot of very bad choices," said Frederick Kagan, director of the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute. "The president needs to open his mind to the possibility of doing things that he has said he won't do and that he clearly doesn't want to do, like putting troops into combat in Iraq and Syria."

Whatever strategy comes out of the White House, the world will be watching amid intense criticism that Obama has no plan for battling the group also known as ISIL.

The terrorists beheaded American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff — posting their executions on the Internet — and Obama and Vice President Joe Biden sent conflicting messages this week on how the United States would respond to the murders.

The confusion began on Wednesday in Estonia, when Obama said that the United States would seek to diminish ISIS to "a manageable problem."

But that same day, Biden declared at a Navy yard in New Hampshire that "we will follow them to the gates of hell until they are brought to justice."

Both comments followed Obama's admission last week that "we don't have a strategy yet" to deal with ISIS in Syria.

Obama, however, [toughened his stance](#) on Friday, saying after a NATO summit in Wales that "we are going to achieve our goal. We are going to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL, the same way that we have gone after al-Qaida."

The United States resumed airstrikes on Iraq last month after ISIS gained ground in trying to establish a caliphate in Syria and Iraq. The Pentagon said Friday that Ahmed Godane, a leader of the al Shabaab Islamist group, was killed in a U.S. strike in Somalia this week.

Rear Adm. John Kirby, the Pentagon's spokesman, called the death a "major symbolic and operational loss" for the al-Qaida-affiliated organization.

That the United States took out an important al-Qaida operative proved the need for a broad strategy that must include intense airstrikes, Marino told Newsmax.

"We have to step up substantially the drone attacks. With the technology we have today, our drones can go in and do surgical precision strikes," he said.

Marino, a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said he was looking forward to Secretary of State John Kerry's testimony this month on the administration's strategy for the Islamic State.

"I don't think you're going to get much resistance out of the Congress on this," he said.

"Sure, there will be individuals who will say that we should not be a part of this, but overall, Republicans and Democrats realize that this is a clear and present danger to the United States and that they have to be destroyed."

Logan of the Cato Institute said that "the ideal" operative for the administration would be if "some 500-pound bombs happen to fall on the heads" of ISIS for beheading Foley, 40, and

Sotloff, 31, "and we wipe our hands and say don't do it again."

That risks the United States being pulled into civil conflicts in both Syria and Iraq, Logan cautioned.

Widespread violence has been occurring in both countries since 2011, when the last of the U.S. forces pulled out of Iraq. In Syria, President Bashar Assad's forces are now being backed by Hezbollah, which supports Hamas in its conflict with Israel.

"My concern is that you talk about your policy being destroying the Islamic State," Logan told Newsmax. "By definition, you are now a principal in this war, this regional war that is going on in both Syria and Iraq.

"The sad fact is that the two most powerful factions inside of Syria are both really bad people," he added. Logan then referenced Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's quip about the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s: "It's a pity they both can't lose."

"They can't both lose," Logan said. "Someone has to win — and until you have an answer to that, I'm very wary of getting the United States on the hook for the outcome of a civil war, one we can't produce a good outcome from."

Marino, however, said that the scenarios cannot be compared when dealing with ISIS.

"That's always a paramount concern, but this situation is quite different," he said. "We're dealing with terrorists.

"If our mission is to destroy the terrorists, then we do that. We obliterate them and stop at that point other than to continue monitoring our terrorist enemies.

"If a civil war is occurring, then you stay out of it," he added. "When the dust settles, you start talking with who prevails.

"But our focus cannot be diverted," Marino told Newsmax. "We have to be lasered in on abolishing the terrorists who threaten this country and our citizens."