



GOP: ISIS Threat Stems From Obama Inaction on Syria

By Todd Beamon
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The beheading of American journalist James Foley by the Islamic State and the widespread attacks on President Barack Obama's response to it have some Republicans debating whether ISIS might have been destroyed last year if the United States had bombed Syria because of President Bashar Assad's use of chemical weapons against his own people.

A year ago this Sunday, Obama reversed course on striking Syria — abruptly deciding to seek congressional approval. Congress balked at Obama's request for a vote, leading the president to ultimately scrap the strikes.

"Last year was a sad turning point in American foreign policy," Rep. Peter King told Newsmax. "I don't know of any instance where an American president ever said that we have to take action under these circumstances, no matter what — and did a complete reversal without telling his allies or his own secretary of state.

"He just totally reversed course, and then by trying to throw it to Congress, he knew that was just his cop-out," added the New York Republican, a member of the House Homeland Security Committee. "Knowing that Congress was not going to vote for it, or that it would have been a delay, would have made it ineffective."

"He used Congress as the reason why he didn't ultimately do anything," Illinois GOP Rep. Adam Kinzinger told Fox News. "History has shown that that inaction, that continued dithering about what to do, has actually led to much bigger problems."

But now that top U.S. agencies issued a warning because of a possible assault **on the Mexico border** from terrorist cells, many Republicans are questioning whether Obama missed an opportunity to defeat ISIS last year.

"We could have done significant damage to ISIS," said King, adding that airstrikes would have strengthened the Western-backed Free Syrian Army, which was not affiliated with al-Qaida.

"It would have severely damaged Assad," he said. "It would have shown credibility — and also we could have weakened ISIS at the same time."

Kinzinger, who sits on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, told Fox that had the United States bombed Syria last year, "we wouldn't be ... talking about ISIS today.

"At that point, there were maybe 2,000 ISIS. Today, there are tens of thousands of them."

But other Republicans have charged the exact opposite, with Kentucky **Sen. Rand Paul** arguing that America's longstanding foreign policy of "shooting first and asking questions later" hastened the rise of the group formerly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria — even delivering arms to the rebels backing them.

Texas Rep. Louie Gohmert also told Fox that "ISIS would have already taken over all of Syria" if the United States had struck last year.

Story continues below video.

Christopher Preble, vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute in Washington, agreed.

"I'm reasonably confident that ISIS, the Islamic State, would be in an even stronger position in Syria than they are right now," he told Newsmax, contending that many of the more moderate groups opposing Assad were so fractured that they could not have posed a unified threat to ISIS.

"The less extreme of the opposition groups are badly divided and are not in a very strong position to fight against ISIS," he said. "There are some units that have fought relatively well, others have not. But they were putting pressure on ISIS."

This is just as much the crux of the issue then as now with the Islamic State threat, said Ohio Rep. Michael Turner, who serves on the House Armed Services Committee.

"The parallels are eerily similar. The reason why Congress didn't support bombing Assad is because the president didn't have a real plan," Turner said.

"He couldn't tell us who we were for — and many people had concerns about his bombing plan, considering there were weapons of mass destruction at risk."

The congressman acknowledged to Newsmax that by not bombing Assad, the United States now does not have to worry about ISIS obtaining the Syrian president's cache of chemical weapons.

However, a broader dilemma remains, Turner said.

"The president's hands-off foreign policy, where he walked away from Syria and Iraq — after walking away from his 'red line' in Syria and after walking away from and pulling

the troops out of Iraq — has contributed to the environment that has resulted in ISIS having strength and a stronghold.

"The president has been hands off in both Syria and Iraq, and that has allowed a vacuum from which ISIS has taken hold," he said.

ISIS has expanded into Iraq in recent months, slaughtering thousands of Yazidi Kurds and driving thousands more from their homes to face thirst and starvation on Mount Sinjar.

"ISIS, it's an opportunistic group," said Cato Institute's Preble. "This is a group that is not large enough or capable enough to hold large swaths of territory.

"They move to where there are opportunities and where they are under less stress," he said. "They exploit the vulnerability of their opponent — and the opponents include the Assad regime" and many Christian minorities.

"I don't think there's any evidence to support the claim that bombing Assad in August of last year would have prevented ISIS from moving into Iraq," he said. "Quite the contrary."

Obama admitted this week that "we don't have a strategy yet" in battling ISIS — but whatever comes from the White House must include broad airstrikes against the Islamic State, Republicans said.

"If we're going to attack ISIS, we have to attack all of ISIS," King told Newsmax. "You can't just attack part of it. So long as they have a safe haven or sanctuary in Syria, it makes us less effective against ISIS if we are going to take strong action, which I believe we have to."

"We've had over a year to put this plan together, and he has done nothing," King added. "That's part of the problem. He's right. There could have been a comprehensive, overall strategy that would have severely damaged ISIS, if not prevented them from growing into the monster they've become."

Preble, however, argued that widespread resistance among Americans to the United States becoming involved in yet another foreign conflict made calls for heavily bombing ISIS from Congress members "troubling."

"People who are supposed to be representing the interests and wishes of their constituents," he said. "They're effectively saying that they wish the president to circumvent their authority and the wishes of their constituents. That's problematic.

"There is a fundamental contradiction in U.S. policy," Preble added, noting that the objective now must be to topple Assad and eliminate ISIS.

"It's very difficult to do both because it means a much more concerted campaign than

one that the public is likely to support — and for good reason," he said. The fear is that the United States becomes "drawn into the middle of a civil war that does not directly engage U.S. vital security interests and American security.

"There is a fundamental contradiction," Preble concluded. "So we don't have a lot of good options right now."